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Nancy Cunard remembers George Moore from the very beginning of the century, when she was a little girl and he a frequent visitor to her parents' country house at Nevill Holt in Leicestershire. There, G.M., as he was always known to his friends, wrote much of his Irish trilogy, for this was the Irish period, managing to seclude himself from the house parties she has briefly recorded as his background there at that time.

Encouraged by the fact that she inherited one of his beautiful Impressionist paintings—a Manet—she has drawn her individual portrait of him from memory quoting such of his letters to her as had been copied before the destruction of all the originals during the last war. She tells of George Moore's lifelong devotion to her mother, of his encouragement and criticism of her own poetry in the twenties, and has endeavoured to recapture some of his voice and wit, having known 'the hermit of Ebury Street,' as he ended by calling himself, during the last thirty years of his long, productive life.

GM

MEMORIES OF GEORGE MOORE

By the Same Author

POETRY

Outlaws (1921)

Sublunary (1923)

Parallax (1925)

ANTHOLOGIES

Negro (1934)

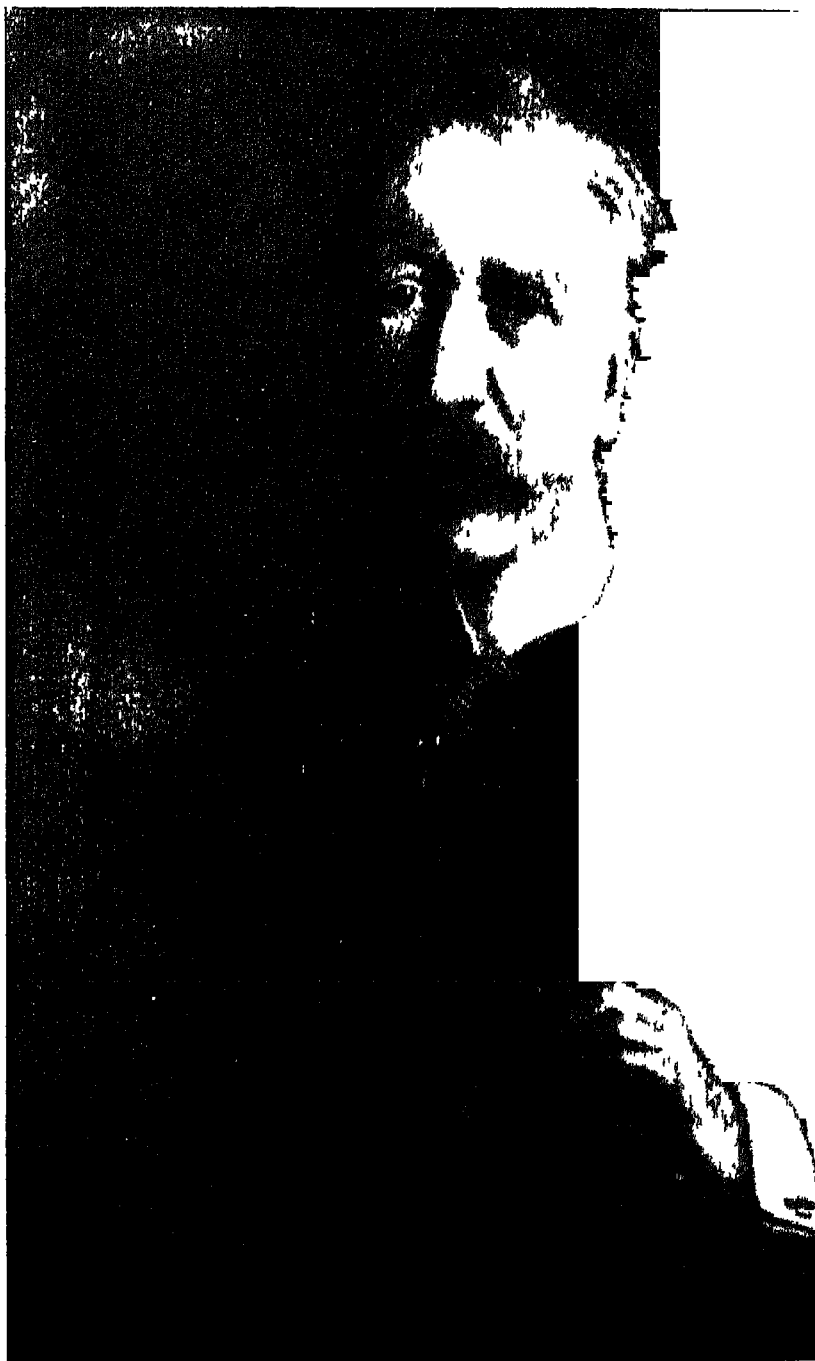
Authors Take Sides (1937)

Poems for France (1944)

PROSE

Grand Man:

Memories of Norman Douglas (1954)



George Moore, 1907, by S. C. Harrison

G M

Memories of George Moore

by Nancy Cunard



Rupert Hart-Davis

Soho Square London

1956

*Printed in Great Britain by Robert MacLehose and Co. Ltd,
The University Press, Glasgow*

'But the lesser side of a man of genius is instructive to study — indeed, it is necessary that we should study it if we would thoroughly understand his genius.'

Thank you, dear G.M., for having written these words on Whistler sixty-five years ago in your Modern Painting, which are set down here anew with the memories of your loving companion on many a walk,

NANCY

Dearest Nancy,

Here is a book that you will
enjoy reading. Do come
back. I am still thinking
of the two pleasant hours we
spent together for I live

THE PASTORAL LOVES OF } on very
DAPHNIS AND CHLOE

dearly
Xmas 24
Joy Moore

ILLUSTRATIONS

George Moore, 1907, by S. C. Harrison	<i>frontispiece</i>
Inscription from G.M. on the fly-title of <i>The Pastoral Loves of Daphnis and Chloe</i>	<i>page 6</i>
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FOREWORD

Not long ago there came into my possession a beautiful painting, which for many years belonged to George Moore: Edouard Manet's *Étude pour 'Le Linge'*. It is a study for the figure in one of his most famous pictures, a portrait of the same matronly young woman at her washing by a wooden bucket, a child holding on to the edge of it: such is *Le Linge*. No link between the two works can exist save that Manet must have made the *Étude* so as to learn more about his model's face before starting on the radiant garden-scene with the woman and child amid the flowers of high summer. Indubitably it is the same woman's face: 'Modèle, Alice Lecouvey, tante de la petite Lecouvey, de l'Opéra', says a faded note stuck on the back.

Set slender flowering branches of March next to the painting, as in that pale drawing-room in the Midlands, at Pertenhall, where it stood for a time — cornelian cherry, pussy-willow and Japanese quince — note how they blend and converse with the blue-green-grey brush-strokes at the bottom of the portrait. Then see this nude, unfinished torso, with tip-tilted nose and round, bright eyes, surmounted by a fringe with a great twist of hair rolled high atop the head, next to a sheaf of French flowers — willow-herb and meadow-sweet from the stream's edge. And again later, with other neighbours — hips and haws and spiralling briony curled round its fire-

red berries from the Quercy hedgerows. How different are all these colours, yet all of them suit, not least the scarlet amid the exuberant whorls, and the model is nearly alive among the passing fronds and festoons. The blue in it, grey at times in the English Midlands, turns into turquoise or hovers into green. Now, in a pale pinewood frame, the *Étude* is a dispenser of light. 'Oh! sa blondeur!' I say when I open the door and the whole of my simple country room seems lit by the picture and I am wishing that Manet and Moore were here to see.

'In Manet there is nothing but good painting', wrote Moore in a study of the artist, extolling his then largely unappreciated genius and condemning his contemporary detractors. All that he says is so interesting that one feels within hand's reach of the Paris of the seventies; such battles could be fought again, by the side of the same guide. He once signed a letter 'The Discoverer of Manet'; there can have been nobody then to dispute him that. His *Modern Painting* in 1893 voiced the feeling that is general about Manet's work today. His analysis is thoughtful and probing, generous too, its roots in that very time the artist was painting him in Paris.

Somehow at this moment I cannot think of one without thinking of the other, and this leads me to wonder at the different men and writers assembled within George Moore during the course of his long lifetime. First, the young man of twenty-one, drawn to Paris in 1873 by his hopes of becoming a painter, and the realisation that came to him there, not without a shock, that he would never be a painter — he would be a writer instead. After some years, Moore back in London at the time of the writing and appearance of his successful early novels, of which the



Manet: *Etude pour 'Le Linge'*

most famous are *A Mummer's Wife* and *Esther Waters*. Moore back in Ireland at the behest of the Celtic Revival and the Irish National Theatre in the early 1900's, which inspired his great and memorable trilogy, *Ave, Salve, Vale*, and the stories full of the tang of Ireland that are in *The Untilled Field*. Moore of Ebury Street in London and of those two acknowledged masterpieces, *The Brook Kerith* and *Héloïse and Abélard*. Moore of the plays and of the art criticisms ; Moore of the autobiographies and of the conversations. All of them came out of Ireland, some with a Parisian flavour and some without, from Moore Hall by Lough Carra, County Mayo, out of the little boy born in 1852 who could not learn things easily and had such a dreadful time with his spelling.

To me there is yet another George Moore, the 'G.M.' of my own childhood.

'Remember him,' says his Manet, although I do not need Alice Lecouvey to tell me that, for he is often much in my mind. There is also that letter from him at the time I was setting a small book of his by hand in 1928, my Hours Press edition of *Peronnik the Fool*. Why not write a preface to it? — he asked. If so, 'the subject should be Holt. I wish you would turn those past times over in your mind; spend an evening or two with the subject, and perchance it may flash into your mind in literary form. . . . Personal literature, as I have often impressed upon you, is the only literature for the age it is written and for the age that follows.'

Many are the memories, and I shall go further than the time he suggests, the time of his many visits during my childhood to Nevill Holt. There was also the G.M. of Ebury Street, and *ce cher Moore* who came over to France

in the twenties. In all, the moments spent with him — how many of them alone with him — stretch over the first three decades of this century.

These memories are but mine, mine alone, not more than related and unrelated memories, with long gaps in between certain years and the fact is stressed because personal memories are often misnamed 'biography'. Those who want to read about George Moore's long and productive existence as man, as artist, and who may come upon my book without knowing the beautiful biography by Joseph Hone must go to Hone's *Life of George Moore* (Gollancz, 1936), a very well-written book and a finely composed one.

I have quoted, and taken extracts from, some of G.M.'s letters to me; this has been possible only thanks to Desmond Shawe-Taylor's visit to Paris in 1935 when he was helping Joseph Hone with the *Life*, to which he contributed an excellent chapter. Providentially I gave him copies then of a third or so of the sixty-four letters I possessed from G.M. that remained out of a larger number already dispersed by the moves of the twenties. All the originals of these sixty-four letters, save three concerning printing matters, disappeared during the holocaust made of my books, papers and other belongings by the German soldiery and French peasantry at their prolonged sacking of my house at Réanville in Normandy during the last war.

My grateful thanks are due therefore to providence, to Desmond Shawe-Taylor and Joseph Hone for the preservation, in copy at least, of some of the letters, and to Charles Burkhart, a young American writer who, while preparing his thesis on the Letters of George Moore, was

kind enough to make copies of these again for me. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Mr C. D. Medley for permission to quote from G.M.'s letters and other copyright material, and to Rupert Hart-Davis for his assistance with the proofs.

NANCY CUNARD

May-October 1955, Lamothe Fénelon, Lot, France

Part One

ONE

I SUPPOSE I was about four years old when I first remember G.M., and I suppose I may, in some sort, even call him 'my first friend'. He came so often to Holt, generally on lengthy visits, and appeared then to be so much of the place, talking to me always in a manner beyond my years and taking so much interest in all that concerned me, that he is the central figure of childhood, and it is thus I think now of George Moore who was always known as G.M. to his friends.

It was then his 'Irish period', when he was hoping that Ireland would come to possess a literature and a theatre of her own along with the revival of the Irish language. 'Keeping tryst' (a very Moore-ian expression) with her whom he has likened to a sparkling fountain that ever renews itself — that is to say, with my mother — he would come two, three or more times during each of those Edwardian years, to the old stone house in Leicestershire where I was born. If I knew him first when I was four, he must have seen me first in a nurse's arms.

Famous he was already, then forty-eight years old, living at 4 Upper Ely Place, Dublin. A voice, aerial and unexplained, had bidden him offer himself to Ireland, to the Celtic Renaissance brought into being by Yeats and Lady Gregory, by Edward Martyn and AE. Coinciding with his loathing of 'the injustice of the Boer War' and the atmosphere thus created in England, it impelled him to

leave London for Ireland. The voice speaking to him in 1899 in a London street had said nothing about Catholicism, but all those Irish years of his (as is brilliantly recounted in *Ave, Salve, Vale*) were run through with his probings into Catholic dogma: to him 'Papistry'. It was also the period of *Sister Teresa* and *The Untilled Field*, of *The Lake* and *Memoirs of my Dead Life*. Part of the gestation and writing of his Irish trilogy certainly took place at Holt. On the crest of his long, multifarious wave, he was also, at moments, in literary despondency here, and some of the re-writing of his books was done 'in the Long Room, a beautiful room for my work in the morning'.

He used to say that I was a romantic child. Be that as it may, I shall perhaps be guilty of romancing here and now — if only once in all — about the first time I remember G.M. talking to me. It may well have been the first time of all; I cannot affirm it was, being then still very small.

My desire to learn to read was acute and there was an early reverence in me for those who wrote books. Easy words, 'dog' and 'cat' words and much else, had been mastered, but the longer phrases and abstract terms still gave me so much trouble that I feared I should never read properly. A book in my hands, accompanied with a little pretence, was my evening pleasure for an hour in the nursery, or even in a roomful of guests, as in the Hall at Holt, where, on that occasion, curled up near a great fire of logs resting on ashes hardened to stone by the passing years, I 'read'.

It may well have been the first time G.M. spoke to me when, to my dismay, he approached, saying:

'Nancy, you have a book. Can you really enjoy it at

your age? Let me see. Oh! *The Violet Fairy Book!* So you have got beyond *Reading without Tears!*'

Reading without Tears! The very name of the good volume which may have belonged to a grandmother is enough to evoke not only the Hall but the whole of earliest childhood in that house so often graced with G.M.'s remarkable presence.

Holt, Nevill Holt, is not a castle, although its size, importance and noble aspect might well suggest the term. A castle is, by rights, a great place full of towers, battlements and crenelations, preferably on top of a high hill and visible from afar. One might as well be a purist about the word, with Castle Rockingham, which has every one of these attributes and is mentioned by Shakespeare, in sight a few miles away. In its essential, oldest parts, Holt may be as ancient, although it is of gentler mien than mighty, assertive Rockingham. One was told that Holt had been built as 'a hunting-box for William Rufus'; it was much smaller then. Whoever said this must have been pleased with his term, which seemed hardly less odd than the lack of knowledge about the history of the place. As early as I remember, I gloried in its great age.

In grey and yellow stone and old stucco, the long stretch of the house is attached at one end to a church; the whole of its length merges into this. Fine, ancient stables stand apart at an angle. A later-day loggia, known as the Cloisters, and a Georgian wing are at the back where a large Victorian dining-room had also been added. Handsome indeed is the main entrance, that front porch with its crenelations and Thomas Palmer's richly carved oriel window of 1453 to the left of it. All the front — a long,

narrow, harmonious tapestry unrolled to the full — is visible and of a piece. Not so the oldest part of the building, King John's Tower, hardly discernible from without, to be known only from within as you climbed its worn, curving stair. A great lawn between two avenues of very tall beech-trees, a terrace looking towards sunset, walled gardens, secular oaks and elms as one reaches the house through the chestnut avenue with its iron gate standing ever open between the stone piers that bear the arms of the Nevills, a bull's head arising out of a crown . . . such is the walk in memory round Holt, the first panorama of my life.

It took its name from early owners, a branch of the Nevill family. Standing nobly and apart, surrounded by its own fields, away from main roads on a broad, indeterminate height, assuredly it must have been rich, prosperous and much inhabited at one time. There was a theory it had once been Church Lands. No one knew when the last Nevills had left. Last century a family named Grieveson lived here. In the late seventies, a brother of my father's bought it in a dilapidated condition and was killed playing polo soon after. It then became my father's, with 'Granny McEvers', already venerable, established here to preside, until her death at the age of ninety or so, over her grandchildren — my father, his other brother and four sisters.

Hunting years followed; the old stables were filled with horses, carriages and a coach, my father being Master of Hounds from 1878 to 1888. After his marriage to my mother in 1895, modernising changes began and the mid-Victorian furniture disappeared little by little, making way for solid oak tables and chairs, chests and benches and



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Nevill Holt

other things in keeping with the feudal aspect of the house.

I seem to remember the men in armour in the Hall at about the same time I first became aware of G.M. — four types of tournament armour still in use in the reign of Henry VIII. A great tapestry concealed a staircase between two of them — Cain fleeing from the wrath of God with Abel tumbled at his feet. Later, the installation of electricity brought to light a perplexing series of smoke-brown paintings high up near the roof, possibly the Wars of the Gods and Giants, G.M. and I said, heavy limbs tussling upside down in all directions. Two graceful, filled-in stone windows also appeared then above the great fireplace.

The gardens developed throughout the years and the swards grew smoother, while straggling bushes were cut, bullocks' blood administered in bucketfuls to yews of hesitant growth, and topiary much practised by my father. Chopin's Third Ballade and Beethoven Sonatas were played with skill and feeling by my mother, who would be reading the classics and contemporary French literature half through the night. It was in the tower room above the porch that my father spent most of his time, hammering silver, carving coconuts elaborately to mount them into cups, and making other things with his able hands. Thoroughly conservative in his ideas, he was manually an ingenious, gifted man in all his manipulations of wood and iron. The silver leaves on the dinner table were the result of months in 'Sir Bache's Tower'. The silver fox, life-size, on a stand in the oak-panelled Breakfast Room, was a parting gift from the five hundred members of his Hunt.

Somehow I felt — and was — entirely detached from both, admiring and critical of them by my own standards, those of a solitary child wondering much in silence how life was going to be. It seems fantastic now to think of the scale of our existence then, with its numerous servants, gardeners, horses and motor-cars, now that all this has floated away for ever and time wears such a different dress. Today Holt is an expensive preparatory school of a hundred or more inmates, well kept, impersonal, and — to me who have seen it three times in all since childhood — ‘de-hydrated’ of meaning and feeling. So be it. It is beautiful yet.

T W O

G.M. HAD met my mother in 1894, before her marriage, and his description of that first meeting with her, then about nineteen, was vouchsafed me considerably later and was a memory precious to him. One can see why: her looks and charm, for a start. Her tastes were musical, literary, artistic, she loved and promoted good conversation by her own sporadic outbursts of airy, fantastic wit, and developed a remarkable gift for entertaining on a large scale. Later on all of this went *con brio furioso* but the times at Holt evoke words like 'spacious, comfortable and leisurely'.

The first thing to impress me about G.M. was, of course, his appearance and the fact that he spoke differently from everyone else. The sound of that rich voice, filled now and again with the rolling billows of brogue, the use he made of his hands while talking, especially when breaking into French, were extraordinary. He was distinctly 'funny' to me as a child, though not all the time, for I would see him in long sustained conversations as well, his pale blue eye quiescent, until it lit up in sudden agreement or in even more rapid disagreement with the talk, waiting for the words that set him muttering and often led to an explosion. Dearly would I have loved to understand what aroused G.M. to such vigour. A great joy it was to see his round, plump, white hands — his very arms, indeed — fly up to heaven in surprise, alarm or expostu-

lation; no pleasure at all to see him in prolonged sulks. His curiosity and interest in little daily matters were boundless, he was full of mischief and a tease. His manners impressed and surprised me: that ceremonious bow, that conventional way he had with people for whom a mere formal how-do-you-do appeared to suffice. At times, with those he knew well, his impetuosity was like a jet.

Later on a reason for such contrasts became clear. His background and upbringing as the son of the distinguished Irish landlord of Moore Hall, County Mayo, who bred racehorses and was in Parliament, would account for the drawing-room politeness. He was the eldest son of this gentleman described in *Salve* as one who wore the Lord Palmerston look, 'the air of the generation' in the 1850s. In glorious contradiction with himself, G.M.'s personality and character were pre-eminently those of *the artist* — of how creative an artist is clear in almost all his many books.

His silhouette is one of the most famous among those of the literary figures of his day and was of perennial joy to caricaturists. The portraits by Tonks, by Sickert, by Orpen, done at different times, vary a good deal in their vision of him. On the whole, Tonks has got him superbly in the conversation-piece called *Evenings at the Vale*. That is G.M. to perfection, suavely reading aloud to the Hutchinsons and Tonks. Caricatures by Max Beerbohm, every one of the many, all add a touch to the ineffable model and are as lifelike as a man wildly running after a train in a fluster of sweat and bother is like his untroubled self.

Those incredibly sloping shoulders are what is best remembered of G.M.'s appearance, the stress is on them for

ever. Those champagne-bottle shoulders . . . that pink-and-white fleshiness of his face . . . those fully-rounded, dough-like hands with tapering fingers that looked incapable of doing up a button or opening a bottle, hands that addressed themselves in leisurely rhythm, and with how much conviction, to the setting of words on paper . . . those pale eyes of blue, of sheer, clear, water-blue . . . that astonishing voice and way of speaking. . . . All this together could well suggest that such an apparition never before issued from nature's many moulds. And then it moved, decorously and with balance; its tread was that of a big pussy-cat that comes up unseen and is suddenly there. Any brusque interruption of the cadence produced a very awkward gesture indeed; this was true of him as well on the non-physical plane: there were frequent explosions.

Once he was 'as golden as the sunflower' (he says so himself). That was in the days of Manet — and very misleading to one who saw him only much later are those several likenesses by Manet that depict a tall, thin, gangling, untidy man much older than his twenty-to-thirty years, his face lost in a hirsute mass — the fashion of the time. He *was*, it seems, like that in the seventies. When I knew him first, there was a sort of foreshadowing of whiteness about his thick uncurly hair. Why was it so thick, many years later, when he was nearly eighty? He told me he thought it might be because he did not wash it 'so very often'. Sometimes he would be smartly dressed: a top hat, a white or grey waistcoat, a pair of dove-coloured gloves in one hand, but that would be in London. In the years of Holt, the suits he wore were quiet, well-cut if sometimes rather rumpled, darkish and of good quality.

Often, to be sure, he had a rich silk tie on, and sometimes a very high, stiff white collar. Above all, what a personality there was in those slow-moving, critical, appraising hands, often in long, soft shirt-cuffs done up so tightly.

The hands are almost as famous as the shoulders. He would often be reading aloud and, as he read, one of them would rise, giving shape to the subject. Anyone can scan a rhythm or pretend to, but G.M. seemed to be fashioning what he read in his excellent, quiet voice, beautifully controlled. How eloquent were those hands to the end of his life. There was a bit of a tummy to him already, which seemed quite suitable, and if his hair was turning grey it had several colours, a touch of white, a few touches of yellow, with a rebellious 'feather' often sticking up on top of the parting, his tie slightly crooked and a few waistcoat-buttons not in line — momentary distractions set right with exaggerated punctilio when the hostess called his attention to them. His moustache, more or less of the walrus kind, hid the baroque fleshiness of his lips, causing those sudden naïvetés, those horrid sarcasms and provocative tirades to issue from an oracular and bosky depth.

As he was known for his wit, he would often be set a teaser. If it appealed, he rose gladly to the lure and the room would soon be ringing with laughter, so droll, so original were his arguments. But look! Here is one person who is not laughing at all — the very one who dared embark on a little Moore-baiting. Or maybe G.M. himself starts the tilting. He spars a bit and then demolishes his adversary after getting him just where he wants him, or may himself be discomfited and thrown. Not for long

as a rule, for back he comes with his second wind. And never was a truer word spoken than that quoted in Hone's *Life* on the score of some of G.M.'s Irish ancestors: 'Scratch a Moore and your own blood will flow.'

You would suddenly find him beside you unperceived, thanks to that something quiet and cat-like about him, continued in the soft discretion of the tread. And there was something else to him that evoked a fish, a large distinguished carp, although this sounds as if it will hardly do. For how the two came together, producing a fine oval that swam in leisurely fashion across a room and also moved like a debonair feline, I really cannot explain. Maybe it has something to do with those caricatures.

He had been taught as a child to think of himself as very ugly, unattractive, at least. Nothing of the kind, certainly not when I knew him. Among the many people who then looked odd to me, G.M. may well have looked the oddest. But soon I found that he had what, later, I would call 'charm' — a thing imperceptible to those who found him unsympathetic, because he appeared too egotistic and self-willed in his opinions. There were some people whom he detested and, well, they had best keep away; others aroused his little malices and delight in shocking. There were terrible rows with yet others, the rights and wrongs of which it would take pages to resuscitate. On meeting him at Holt, some were thrilled and some were awed; it seems to me no one remained indifferent to his presence, and in the end most people found him astonishingly interesting, people who in the beginning might have thought him annoyingly provocative. He was much more 'difficult' in general with men than with women, especially with young men aware how uncer-

tain they seemed about themselves. To me he was very kindly; to me, save once or twice in all, he was ever benign. He was 'winning' (one of his pet words for a woman). Yes, 'winning' will do very well for G.M. and all his patience with me during the nursery and school-room years.

Not only was he extremely witty on every occasion save when he was deep in the sulks about something, but funny and amusing, and would at times become ridiculous — passingly, but with a zest. Soon I came to distinguish between the times he meant to be so and those when he did not, and it is pleasing to come across this in *Salve*:

'To be ridiculous has always been *mon petit luxe*, but can anyone be said to be ridiculous if he know that he is ridiculous?'

He would be funny without knowing it, pretty soon would see how funny he must appear and then came some lively 'mumming' on top of that.

The 'Tea' and the 'Salt', for instance. Could that wonderful voice but be revived, all plumped out with its rich bits of brogue, I think no one present could keep a straight face when G.M., once more, would set down his delicate cup of Earl Grey Mixture and suddenly clamour for 'Kitchen tea', or be glaring down the lunch-table with cold annoyance and a ceremonious bow:

'I thank you, no. I do not wish for any of that salt. Oh, of course, if you insist, go ahead, go ahead. *But you will be eating the bones of your ancestors.*'

Salt should come from the salines, not from Cercbos, he said. The *gros sel de France*, ah! Or that given sheep to lick, rock-salt, never mind its red marble appearance — pure,

both of them, not refined with detestable chemicals and powdered bones for whiteness.

Of course he was mumming, although mumming on two subjects that were perfectly serious to him. And if these are two of my first memories, not a day passed without his affording some exquisite piece of fooling.

I think I must have watched him a lot. No one spoke at all like him, no one else's mind worked like his in all its paradoxical, individual Irish brilliance. That long-drawn 'Oh' of stupor, suggesting that something portentous had just occurred, was merely surprise, but it sounded like awe. His sudden bouts of mimicry, the way he had of taking the words out of someone's mouth. . . . That person was heading one way, but G.M. would deliberately go and *finish the thought himself* in an entirely different direction, discomfiting or delighting his interlocutor. This generally led to that great and joyful laugh of his, ending with the characteristic chuckle, 'Khk, Khk, Khk' — long, rotund and juicy.

Never again in life have I heard such a rich voice, nor anything like its peculiar emphasis, a bubbling hot dish of a voice. Some words were pronounced much articulated, the word 'Well', constantly used at the beginning of a remark, often achieving two syllables. An example (how it returns to my ear) can be got out of a wasp:

'Wel-le, if you will leave him a-lone, hee will go a-way.'

The more conservative and conventional members of the house-parties were not the most appreciative of G.M.'s drolleries, although even those who disliked him or whom he made uncomfortable could not deny that he

was a beautiful conversationalist. Yet the subjects, the subjects! Was it really permissible to go on so much, for instance, about Catholicism, in such a flippant vein? Such queries were often silenced by the hostess who pointed out that G.M. was the life and soul of the party; he must not, she said, be taken so seriously as all that, do you not see how he exaggerates, some of it is pure childishness? He certainly had everyone laughing when — casting about maybe for something that would draw the flow of talk on to American themes, there being a rather consequential American present, with his daughter dressed in bright pink satin and diamonds under an enormous feathered hat, at lunchtime — G.M. blandly announced that he had always thought the Knickerbocker Trust Company in New York must have something to do with knickerbockers. And now he was told it had not. If it did not make knickerbockers, then why was it called that and what *did* it make?

This kind of thing would bring a heavy frown into my father's face, yet, more times than one, I would see the frown dissolve in spite of himself into laughter — really, Moore was preposterous.

By this count, laughter seems to be what one notices and loves first in life. All the other things come gradually later. Of 'other things' in G.M. there were plenty. Child of nature, wilfully partisan, tenacious of all that he cared about, and of complete artistic integrity, he was a terrific disciplinarian with his work: *a good tale told in the best style* he could achieve is a simple but adequate way of putting it. He was a very solitary artist, for all his human gregariousness. No matter if literary fashion today causes him to be less read than he was twenty or thirty years ago,

read for ever he will be. He is one of the immortals, one of the glorious eccentrics to boot.

To many he was a delight and a wonder, the very opposite to many others, partly on account of his slashings at writing and art which often seemed — and were — grossly unfair. Maurice Barrès, for instance, never forgave his attacks, says Jacques-Emile Blanche in his revealing memories of Moore.

To me, a delight and a wonder he certainly was, and. . .

At this point he might interrupt with admonitions about 'hagiography', or with those words that frequently came down like a douche on whoever was boring him by going on too much about something:

'Wel-le, now we have heard the story of . . .' — 'we can perhaps pass on to something else' being the unspoken end of the sentence. It was never uttered, the expression on his face, the icy look in his eye in conjunction with the sudden words, being quite sufficient.

THREE

THE house-parties in the early days at Holt consisted of somewhat diverse people, smart and wordly, good riders to hounds and racegoers, men of wit and women of fashion, politicians and diplomats, whereas the men guests, at least, became more intellectual as the Augusts and autumns proceeded and the host was away shooting and fishing lengthily in Scotland. G.M. came here as often in early as in later times, appearing as much at ease in the company of some ambassador or naval commander as in the vaguely mystical atmosphere of the Gaelic Revival, brought for a little while to Holt by Lord Howard de Walden, Josef Holbrooke and Herbert Trench along with their plans and talk about the plays of the first, the music of the second, the poetry of the third. A caricature of Max Beerbohm dates that epoch: 'Mr George Moore, preacher to Lord Howard de Walden. 1909.'

My picture of Holt is one of constant arrivals and departures during half the year, of elaborate long teas on the lawn with tennis and croquet going on, of great winter logs blazing all day in the Hall and Morning Room, with people playing bridge there for hours on end. Beautiful and exciting ladies move about in smart tailor-mades; they arrived in sables or long fox stoles, a bunch of Parma violets pinned into the fur on the shoulder. Summer-long, in shot silk and striped taffeta

they stroll laughing and chatting across the lawns. All these toilettes with their ruchings and flounces, the veils with big, smart spots on them, the feather boas (*a lie de vin* one especially) made me long to grow up and wear such things as well. It was a much corseted period of busts and shirt-waists, but in the early evenings some of the ladies went floating through the warm atmosphere in trailing teagowns of beige lace, of lilac, wistaria and cream-coloured chiffon. And by the way, G.M. wanted to know, why use the word 'corset', a French word, instead of the excellent old English one, 'stays'? Why say 'shirt-waist', which is American, and not 'blouse'? It would be pointed out quickly enough that *he* was constantly breaking into French. Well, he admitted he was, but, dear me, somehow that seemed different, and the English language was in danger of dying if too many foreign words were injected into the daily use of it. A great deal of interesting talk about 'the proper use of the English language' would be voiced by G.M. while his hands seemed to be shaping the periods.

Flowers were everywhere, including hothouse blooms and sometimes orchids brought by somebody from London or his own conservatory, and a glory of azaleas filled the great Chinese bronze incense-burner in the Hall (now in the British Museum). It was in the Morning Room they sat most, in that long, low, harmonious place with a stone floor and many oriental rugs strewn across it, that grew yearly more luxurious because of an increasing number of Italian damasks, cushions, and brocades. Every ray of sun seemed concentrated in the four window-seats decked with old Chinese bowls of pot-pourri. The two oak writing-tables, one at each end, were elaborately

appointed with everything to hand for the distinguished calligraphy of those times. Art-books and new novels lay about in profusion; here a great box of 'candy', there a box full of aromatic Russian cigarettes.

G.M. would sometimes be staying at Holt when no house-party was going on, and it is one of these quieter times that contains a little memory of his approval of the hostess's way of rubbing the marble plaque above the stone fireplace in the Morning Room every day after lunch. Her busy little hand, he told her, knew the difference between horrible varnish, ordinary wax and the beauty of real patina — a fact for which the old Italian mythological subject could not but be grateful to her with her small silk handkerchief and bare palm. She had a genius for beautifying which he delighted in. Given full play all over the large house, it did wonders even in the unmanageable Hall, creating, transforming, humanising. It was always at concert-pitch and got things done at a tremendous rate. 'Moving the furniture' was a constant occupation, one in which G.M., airily called or beckoned to from the other end of a room by the hostess's small gloved hand, would gladly and lightly take part. An enchanting letter from him to her exists in which he recalls the happy unpacking of many strangely assorted objects from America, their juxtaposition in the trunks being a delight to him.

He loved beautiful furniture and was well versed in styles and epochs; there was much talk of furniture as well as of art, but the name of one item had him guessing: what could a 'tallboy' mean? Something like a *chiffonnier*, a *fouffe-tout*? No, the latter is a sort of bag. A *sous-main* then? Of course not; a *sous-main* is a blotting-book of the

mid-Victorian epoch. His taste for 'pretty pieces of furniture' was highly developed and he sometimes grew lyrical at the sight of an object that would have been made 'in the time of Flaubert', at the grace of an old French lamp, and, the talk now being on France, at the thought of that heavy sweep of red plush curtains and the folds in them that enriched the Second Empire. As for the word 'alcove' — *les secrets de l'alcove* — what better word could there be to define the nest in which lovers disported? A blessed period, he said. I believe it was his favourite, that of his own early youth. As for the 1830s — ah, that was the best time of all for women's dress: crinolines and poke-bonnets; a woman was seen to fine advantage in the fashions of that day. And of a little later too. You don't believe me? he would ask. Then look at the daguerreotypes; now *that is fine photography, unlike the horrible vulgar things called photographs nowadays*. Sometimes he urged the hostess to wear a crinoline and have a daguerreotype made of herself therein. And suddenly a memory of two of these poke bonnets arises. Who can tell where he found them: could he have sent for them to Ireland? There appeared one day a prosaic one in yellow straw with red tartan ribbons, and the airiest, flimsiest dream in peach-coloured cambric and gauze — presents from him 'to Maud and Nancy'. I had not thought of them since. The yellow straw one remained with me for many years; he saw it once more in my home on the Ile St Louis in Paris in the mid-twenties and was amused and touched. The hostess, said G.M. again and again, was a pure Boucher to him; or, if she preferred, a Watteau. He did not like a certain hat she wore, but forgave it when she took it off — the horrid thing — and out tumbled the

shining surprise of her golden hair. Letters of his at this time reveal a most loving feeling for Holt, where there was so much that pleased him: 'a Leicestershire Abraham with his sheep under the trees' . . . those Italian prints of *Le Ore*, a sort of Empire Pompeian set of the hours of day and night, in colours, in his bedroom.

Yes, the Morning Room is where live most of the indoor memoirs of G.M. at Holt. Here he is, being drawn by Max Beerbohm, *for me*. Or did Max Beerbohm do this particular caricature from memory while staying at Holt without G.M. being there, penning it, as he did, directly on to a page of my Celebrities book? The most ineffable caricature of all, whoever has it now (for the book with many famous signatures in it was stolen a few years later), may agree that *this* particular G.M. resembles a late blackberry in the hedge, swollen with suns and rains and near collapse. In its shocking finality it is almost a caricature to end all caricatures — at least of G.M. Painted in generous swirls of ink, and made to look thirty years older than his right age, the poor creature seems liquefying, about to drop. Why did he stand for such cruelties? He seems to have made up his mind not to care, realising that nothing would stop them. In consequence, no one should have resented his own verbal barbs (all of them exquisitely exact), but resent them violently some of his victims did. I think this uproarious piece of Beerbohm wickedness was despatched in the Morning Room in his unsuspecting presence. There was another 'funny' of him made for me in the same stolen book by Jacques-Emile Blanche, somewhere between words written by Rodin in Paris and Thomas Beecham's signature; would that both these visions might be recorded here.

They are talking at tea-time in the Morning Room of the Russo-Japanese War, stimulated by the voluble accounts of that young American war-correspondent, Ashmead Bartlett, who has been through it all. What emphasis, remarks G.M., he does bring into this. There is nothing like being interested in your subject, whatever subject that be — Waldstein, for instance, Waldstein can hardly talk of anything but his excavations at Herculanum. The talk moves on to Edgar Saltus and the way he characterised the Roman Emperors in his astonishing *Imperial Purple*, and G.M.'s opinion of this or that novel is sought. Presently someone says how gratifying it must have been when his *Esther Waters* caused a hospital nurse to think of founding an Esther Waters Home for the children of unmarried mothers.

A laugh goes up in a corner between two people talking about a frequent guest here in those times — such a generous hostess in her own home. What matter if she is not interested in intellectual pursuits? Her country-house is so comfortable, with its many bathrooms and variegated bathsalts — the conservatory, the French chef, the latest novels, every one of them. Do you know what she does? She goes to the fiction counter and points to a heap: 'Send me all that lot' — books by the yard, by the cube! She wears a resplendent dog-collar of pearls and diamonds with her impeccable tailor-made; a shooting-stick is in her hand day-long and she is really very handsome, with her glowing brown curls under a Homburg hat. How often I see G.M. whispering some saucy, racy tit-bits into her delighted ear.

'She must have been a high-stepper in her time!' he

says. 'Well, she is that yet — a point on which I am sure her many swains will agree.'

Another figure delighted him at Holt — the 'Three-Decker' from across the ocean, a monument in full sail. Nothing could compare with those ostrich feathers, cascading and erect on the crest of a hat, set atop of what the French call '*une coiffure à l'oiseau*'. That, he would point out, is one deck, joined, of course, to the other two; the well-deployed bosom; last of all, the bustle: 'Of course that is a bustle — of a kind, if you like, but still — a bustle!'

Someone asks G.M. how he likes young American widows and he supposes the word 'fast' now expresses what he means when he says 'dashing'. Well, there they are, those he has met here, heavily scented sirens, trailing their provocative teagowns about and smoking cigarettes in very long tortoiseshell holders — why should they try to play bridge when they can sit on sofas and be made love to by gallants, arousing jealousy in other gallants, and going off into peals of tinkling laughter? 'I fancy they are not averse to a *stepaside* now and then, and what is the ha-arm in that? And by the way', he is suddenly reminded, 'there is a beautiful story going round now about. . . . Oh what is that woman's name?'

Well knowing the frequent impossibility G.M. had in recalling names, everyone urged him to be on with his tale (he told it me later, but it dates from Holt):

'She was losing her husband's affections, you see. So she went to Paris and took lessons from some of the ladies in the Chabanel. A French *cocotte* has a good deal to teach, you may be sure. When she returned she began to put these lessons into practice in bed with her husband. Oh, it

must have been a dreadful moment when she heard him say: "*Dora, ladies never move.*" Khk, Khk, Khk.'

G.M. was not the only one known to have a great feeling for the hostess, and this little story is so apocryphal that maybe he was not even present, although it has been affirmed that he was. The moment was delicate, the host being present, and, said my informant years later, all the gentlemen sitting over their port and brandy wondered what the deuce would be said in his presence by Prince M. if he obeyed the rule of the game in progress. This Prince M. was fabulously rich in money and Slav charm, the most lavish of all in gifts to the house of chocolates and exotic blooms, producing to my entrancement jewelled, enamelled cigarette cases from his waistcoat pockets, gold ones too. His cuff-links were splendid cabochons, crowned monograms enriched his lawn handkerchiefs, and it was a glint of green, I think, that sometimes came into his eye. This *grand seigneur* was a terrific gambler in the best London clubs, one of the really wondrous apparitions of my earliest childhood.

They were playing a sort of Truth game in which every man was bound to say whom he was in love with, if only from afar. Even so, this sounded full of danger and the men wondered if Prince M. would dare out with the truth — which meant the hostess. It would be like him, they thought, and yet. . . .

Well, his turn came in due course and the words that issued with a princely wave of the hand were:

'I? Oh *I* am in love with the page-boy at the St James's Club.'

The sensation was such it seems that the laughter startled the ladies several rooms away.

This charming early-Edwardian piece of foreign wit might have been taken very differently nowadays in such a milieu as Holt was then. It was a great success, the circumnavigation of a nasty reef being much appreciated and the subject so well rounded off there would never be any more Truth games of this kind. And coming from Prince M. too, that paladin of masculinity!

When not discouraged from doing so, I loved 'showing people the house', but it was mainly in the garden I found myself alone with G.M., after trying to drag him up King John's Tower into the wonderful attics beyond. Sometimes I succeeded and sometimes he knew how to be firm. Often he strolled about full of his thoughts underlying a vacant eye, and many a time were they interrupted by my chatterings. They would be about the cedar trees, or the tramps that came by on the road under the terracc generally at sunset, a bottle and a red wipe sticking out of their pockets — generally dirty, slouchy men with stubbly chins and anger in their eyes. Those tramps excited me and I told G.M. I wanted to run away and be a vagabond. Or I would tempt him to the great rubbish heap near the orchard, all strewn with fragments of lovely porcelain cups. On the way there might come a flash of colour: Mrs Empson's cat. To G.M.'s delight, it was a tortoiseshell, for tortoiseshell cats were getting more and more rare, he bade everyone observe. Should we go and see if the jiggles were working in the rose garden? The jiggles — what could they be? What one of the gardeners called the leaden gargoyles recently put up to spout over the lily-pads. Or should we

get out of the sun in the cloresters? And what might *they* be? The same man's name for the Cloisters where we often had tea under the plaster plaque of my great-grand uncle, Robert Emmet, the Irish patriot. Would he do this, would he do that, would he perhaps climb into my cedar and sit with me in the crook of the main branch and have a taste of my little store of beechnuts in a stone bottle?

Stop and listen to the rooks he would. There was a lot of interest in those rooks (or were they choughs, he asked, remarking that 'chough' is a wonderful word, but of course it means jackdaw). All of a sudden the rooks would come across the lawn homing from their pickings on the ploughland — caw, caw, caw — making a very great fuss. As for the starlings in their whirling, wheeling multitudes, what makes them fly like this, why do they congregate and follow each other in such hosts? His questions rang with mine and were as numerous, there being so much of 'why?' in nature, he said, before you get as far as wondering about people. As for the skylarks, ah, *that is another mystery. The time will come, Nancy, when Shelley's poem will be a great joy to you.*

I have no memories of G.M. with horses, which is curious, because his youth was full of them and he had been a good rider; there were horses, a cob and my kicking pony at Holt. But the ferrets. . . . His curiosity in front of the heaving sack we saw them in one day afforded many questions. Brown, sable, ivory and ermine-coloured little beasts, cousins of stoats and weasels, what could be the point of keeping this tangled mass of six, seven, eight, nine or ten slithering, vicious-looking

creatures with spines like quicksilver, murder in their jaws and bloodlust, unmistakably, in their horrid eyes? What were they used for?

'Rabbiting,' said our coachman, Cockle, and G.M. turned away in pain with never a word.

Another pleasure when I was very small was 'going round the bedrooms' with the housemaids to see that everything was in order for the coming guests. Ink, pens, notepaper and writing-tables in general became my responsibility. The habit of putting blossoms in little vases by the beds came out of this, and led to picking wild flowers all spring and summer for the visitors' rooms, not for the schoolroom alone. Who can tell which particular small concourse of them in his bedroom first caught his eye? It started him talking at length about '*les fleurs des bois* — that is how you say "wild flowers" in French, is it not?' Impressed, he told me, by my knowledge of many of their names, he bade me persevere until I had learned every single one of those, at least, that grew round Holt. They would be of use to him, they would come in very well for something he was writing just then, and be of point in the future too. For years it was one of our subjects, long before this letter of his about the impossibility of making nosegays from the fields in April, May and June. How curious, I thought years later, is this on the part of a man who wrote so much about landscape, who so rightly noticed 'the blue and yellow spring'. But of course he uses 'nosegay' in its true sense — the early daisies and celandines, stars of Bethlehem and harebells are not scented, and many a time, then and later, was G.M. drawn into rhapsodic words about the heavy scentedness of the midsummer meadowsweet:

Spring, 1909, 4 Upper Ely Place, Dublin

I am writing to your mother saying that I shall be glad to come to Holt at the end of the month and stay there for a week — till I go to Bayreuth. You sent me some wild flowers but the task I set you was an impossible one — I know now that it is impossible to gather a nosegay from the hedges before July, and the only flowers the English hedges produce that would make a nosegay are honeysuckle, wild rose, meadow-sweet, and I think there are forgetmenots about the river's brim. The garden forgetmenot is earlier of course but the wild variety blossoms in July, I *think*.

'While memory expands in one direction and contracts in another' is an excellent observation of his — the very words I want. For, while some memories of him are diffusely scattered about the purlieus of Holt, others are contained with precision inside a framework of walks and occasions — they were not 'more or less like this', but 'exactly thus': that day with Holt Wood for instance.

FOUR

It was the summer, I think, of 1906.

Where shall we go today? If, says, G.M., we take the road to Medbourne village, we shall doubtless meet the hounds out exercising with Thatcher, and that is always a pretty sight. And the chances are we shall meet the poor old blind man, Rigby, tapping with his stick, though tapping much less than you would expect, toiling up the steep hill, walking the whole mile between Medbourne and Holt, carrying another telegram, and *that* will probably mean yet more guests are going to arrive. Why does your mother find it necessary to have so many people around her? She is a very kind woman. Not only to her guests. Rigby — the uncle of those ten, eleven, twelve or even thirteen children their parents cannot support! The poorest in Medbourne always seem to have the largest families. One might think they would prefer to practise a little abstention. Your mother took the eldest girl, Emmie — no, Emma — and turned her into a first-rate lady's maid Or we might go towards Blaston. Tell me again, says he, the names of all those villages that took my fancy.

'The rhyming ones,

Ayston and Glaston

Ooston and Glooston

but they are miles away, G.M.; we couldn't possibly get to any of those on foot.'

“Tell me more names. Those places where you go hunting that I like to hear you talk about.”

“Slawston and Stockerston, Horninghold, Wardley Wood, Beaumont Chase, Stoke End, Cranoe.”

He was enchanted with the names, not least by Caldecott in the valley of the Welland, so often hidden in a mist, which, he lamented, was driven across all too fast in the car on Sunday afternoon expeditions to the beautiful ruin of Kirby, with people chattering around him when all he wanted was to be quiet and fill his eye with the romantic distances that were often dark blue and reminded him, in some of their moods, of certain hills in Ireland.

“Caldecott! That is the village where the doctor who brought you into this world lives.”

“Dr Duke lives in the next village, Great Easton.”

“That is the fellow’s name, Duke. My Lord, what a bore the man is when he brings out that photograph! That photograph is his eye-tooth. But what has it got to do with the Rosetta Stone?”

“It’s all mixed up with Easter Island, G.M.”

“With Easter Island! But what can Egypt have to do with Easter Island?”

“He says a mark in the photograph proves something; the same sign, he says, is found in Egypt and on Easter Island.”

“Well, the poor man must have his say. But whatever could have proved something is now gone, thanks to the zeal in that great forefinger of his. “Can’t you see, can’t you see?” and down goes his index on the spot worn to a blur by all that zeal while asking people to look through his loop to see something which he alone has seen. Not

many men can have been such bores about so peculiar a subject. The pursuit of knowledge, where will it not lead?

Still undecided about our road, 'I know where we won't go,' I said, 'to the Fishponds.'

'And why shan't we go there?'

'Edgar Allan Poe,' I murmured, explaining that the low-lying, small lake entirely hidden by dark pine-trees was now associated with dread. I was reading the tales of Poe and it was 'the dank tarn', best kept away from, even at noon.

Today seemed a day, rather, for the fields and, as often, we were drawn eastward, to that great up-and-down stretch of country that leads to meadows threaded by rills set about with willow-trees.

After his writing in the mornings, and conversation at lunch and in the evenings with people who wanted to hear about the way he worked, and what he thought of the Royal Academy, and all kinds of topical matters, it may well have seemed restful to G.M. to be off with the child. There was also his love of nature, and letters of his at *this time testify to his affection for small, pastoral scenes around Holt*. On such walks with me he could be silent or talk of simpler things than Nietzsche and the motifs in Wagner, of 'Papisty' and the demerits of contemporary painting.

'Let us go to Holt Wood for a start!'

Holt Wood — he would murmur the words appreciatively.

'Holt is a hill, it is in the Bible — "the high hills and holts", or something like that. I think it is in the Psalms, in that lovely English of the time of James the First, when

the Bible was re-written. They made a good job of it, Nancy!

Here, growing on a steep hillside, with hardly any flowers in it today, is the wood, a depth of solid green under the serried trees, for now it is July. Cowslips and bluebells and that frail white flower that comes first of all (whose existence my botany-book ignores), and even the cuckoo along with his flower namesake, are all over and done with for another year.

'Flowers, like us, Nancy, have their season. But that is the yaffle's cry! I am not mistaken. *He* is with us the whole year round.' As the bright wing flashes across the ride, G.M. bids me remember that 'yaffle' is a much prettier word than 'woodpecker'.

At the top of Holt Wood is a narrow stretch of grass bounded by a hedge, and here we come upon a man. Now what is he doing? Unmistakably mowing with a scythe, resting at the moment, his whetstone on the grass beside him.

G.M. stops slowly. He does so many things with an extreme slowness of movement, in contrast to that sudden switch-round provoked by a remark or some sudden thought of his own:

'What are you doing, my good man?'

'Mowing, zur. We do be mowing whiles July.'

G.M.'s eye lights up as he tries to draw the mower into a conversation about scythes and grass; in a moment it will be the whetstone. That accent and way of speaking — straight from the loam — must be heard more of! But all the man affords is another simple statement: 'Mowing, zur. We do have to be mowing now, and sometimes whiles August as well.'

Sharpening his scythe he gets back to it, and after watching him for a moment we pass on.

G.M. is in an ecstasy. 'Did you hear what he said? "Whiles"! *That* is old English. Oh what a good expression, "whiles July"!'

This turns into one of our best walks, although G.M., fondling the word, will not take much interest at first in where we go next, through the dense brush and briars of the spinney close to the wood, in the heart of which is Holt Spa, the little spa built in the 1850s. The waters and their renown existed already in the time of the Romans, one had been told. In the middle of last century people came here by the thousand to drink of the waters and bathe their eyes in the virtues of fluorine; a ferocious amount of iron was in the spring here then. All is dried up now, save for a regular drop from a broken pipe above a shallow pool, almost blood-red. The thought of crinolines and top-hats bending over the spring in the midst of fir trees in a forest of brambles makes us laugh, until we remember the spinney could not have existed then. Here, indeed, is a vestige of the road that led to the spa—a carriage-road, perhaps. No one would think of coming here now, hardly even a poacher, with all the rabbits in Holt Wood.

G.M. wants to know why this once-famous place came to an end—the spring must have failed, the capital run out? As we taste the slow drops with their harsh tang of iron, he says:

'You are a romantic child, Nancy. Now why are you so interested in this place?'

'I love it. Look at all the rust. . . .'

He always wanted to hear about the dialect, but all I

could tell him was that the rich, slow *burr* is in all the talk here, in this corner of Leicestershire next to Northamptonshire and Rutland, not more than 'six moile' from Uppingham. You would hear it on the roads, in the village shops, from the farm-hands and labourers, and the voice of a tramp from some other part of the country sounded quite different to me even then. Not allowed a step out of the grounds alone, I had almost no contact with the land-people. An exception or two would occur — mushrooming in solitude at six or seven in the morning — like that time, returning drenched in September dew by the home-farm where they were milking and one of the lads said to the other:

'Cows' waturr be vurry cold this mawnin.'

It would have been a fine entrée into conversation for G.M., for of course he would have wanted to know *why*, and he would have got something out of them, the talk in the end being a mile from the cows.

As for 'my good man' — well might it offend coming from the lips of some tipsy toff. G.M.'s use of it produced broad smiles, and the gaze of the ploughman (as, turning round, I could see) would linger after the strange apparition that ambled along, swinging a tight-rolled umbrella, clad in a city suit and bowler hat, who should have been shod in stout leather instead of wearing those delicate, buttoned boots — considering how long and deep the rain lies on the heavy clay soil hereabouts.

'Ambled' or 'drifted'? He was so light on his feet, so buoyant that his progress seemed to me air-borne. But there was nothing he shirked in the way of climbing over locked six-bar gates, tackling fences and jumping little streams with me if need be, and getting scratched black-

berrying. The awful day he bashed his bowler hat! All patience failing amid the inextricable bramble tangles of America Wood — the rent was enormous, the poor thing ruined, and it was a long time before an end was heard to *that*.

Such walks sounded barbaric to the people round the silver tea-tray. Could I really not be more careful where I took him?

‘*Look* at poor G.M. — obviously exhausted!’

‘But the countryside is full of short cuts through fields and hedges, and the child seems to know them all. We have cut off a mile or two today.’ Such was his loyal defence.

G.M. often said (maybe the first time he said it to me was in Holt Wood): ‘You never know where a path in the forest will lead.’ At this moment he is my path; it has led me to probe a little into the mystery of the story of Holt which, it seems, has never been written. Along this path now comes Harold Sharp, son of the steward of the estate in those long-gone days. How well he remembers George Moore:

We all loved him, simply loved him. My father was fascinated by his talk; my mother thought he had a wonderful mind and a charmingly courteous manner. To me, as a boy, it was a delight to hear him speak. He put you at your ease at once. You know how he was always raking about, talking to everyone and asking questions, because this or that might go into a book. One often saw him walking alone around the place, and not only near the house. I was about twelve at the time I am thinking of and I had just bought a penny whistle. You remember how many grass-snakes there were round Holt Spa, where one would see them sunning themselves? It occurred to me I might try

and charm these snakes with my tin whistle, so I went and sat down and played it by the Spa. Suddenly there was a loud chuckle in the bushes and G.M. appeared. He was alone, but you had surely taken him there, certainly no one else would have done that. He must have liked the place and gone back to see if it would give him something for his writing. My snake-charming amused him a lot and he stayed there talking to me for a long time.

FIVE

WHERE IS G.M.?

Neighbours have come over and they are determined to see him or will have to be asked to stay to tea so as to make his acquaintance. The gardens have been searched, his room as well. Not to be found!

The first footman is sent for: 'William, *where* is Mr Moore?'

'I saw him go off with Miss Nancy, Your Ladyship, about two hours ago in the direction of Ironstone. When I asked if he would be back for tea, Mr Moore said he thought Miss Nancy intended to take him the longest way round today.'

That meant something like three hours, possibly four. Not that we walked all the time. A long rest near a hawthorn might evoke some words about 'the darling pink of the May-bush'. Another pause in front of a new perspective revealed 'a field like an early Corot'. And further on were not only some sheep at a salt-lick but the shepherd with his crook among them; one does not see that often nowadays, says G.M., the shepherd resting under a tree, his sheep all about him, a landscape from the Bible! Or it might be the very sunset that held us, recalling the *Götterdämmerung*, full of unheard trumpets.

On occasion lunch-time had its difficulties for the writer engrossed in his work:

'Go and tell Mr Moore we can't wait any longer. Why doesn't he come? Where is he?'

'Mr Moore is still writing in the Long Room, Your Ladyship.'

'Go and tell him to come down *at once!*'

The footman is gone a full five minutes, hurrying back out of breath, a great blush suffusing his florid, handsome face, with Telling, our blustering, temperamental butler, throwing furious looks at him — how can the serving of lunch for ten proceed with only Charles to help?

'What have you been doing so long, William?'

'Mr Moore . . .' William is in confusion, everyone listening and Telling poised threateningly as well, 'Mr Moore wanted to ask me everything I thought about cricket, Your Ladyship.'

Lunch began and it might have got beyond the entrée when G.M. blandly walked in. One look now conveyed to him that *he was late*. 'Oh my Lord!' he would excuse himself volubly, sit down in haste and be considerably abashed.

Well, what had he spent this morning at?

Re-writing part of *The Lake* in his bedroom, the Long Room — oh, a beautiful room for work, full of light from those three windows, the land falling away outside at some distance from the house, and the blue haze in the valley of the . . . what is it called? . . . the Welland, with Rockingham Castle just emerging from it, four, five, six or seven miles away, not visible every day, of course, being sometimes hidden in the mist. How well this place is named: Holt, Nevill Holt. Who were the Nevills and where did they go, a long or not so long a while back? No doubt there must be some extraordinary story attached to their leaving so wonderful a place as this. Someone had told him that Holt was once Church

Lands, and then the priests were dispossessed. That would mean Henry VIII. As for ghosts, well, every old house must have a ghost or two; it could not get away without having a few ghosts; none had come to him here, although the Oak Room outside his door might seem to creak a little in the night — a thing one could well put up with when the morning sun came floating into the Long Room and he was drawn forthwith to his writing-table, after gazing for a moment at an expanse of field where bullocks cavorted in spring.

That field had been the cause of his lateness this particular day, because, when he was called for lunch, an irresistible curiosity had come over him, and things had gone like this:

‘Do you play cricket, William?’

‘Yes, Mr Moore.’

‘Oh. And do you play football?’

‘Yes, Mr Moore.’

‘Oh. *Where* do you play football?’

‘In that field, Mr Moore, beyond the balustrade. Her Ladyship says. . . .’

‘And where do you play cricket, William?’

‘Same place, Mr Moore. Her Ladyship has sent me . . .’

‘And which do you like best?’

‘Can’t say, Mr Moore. Her Ladyship . . .’

‘And *when* do you play cricket, William?’

‘In summer, Mr Moore. Her La- . . .’

‘And when is football played?’

‘In winter, Mr Moore. Her . . .’

‘Just a moment, William. You *must* know whether you like cricket better than football or no. Now which . . .?’

'*Mr Moore! Lunch is served* and Her Ladyship says will you please come down at once!'

G.M.'s vagueness about time, people said, was just one more quirk to be excused in such a character. By no means unpunctual, he obviously got carried away by his 'composing'. You could certainly count on him for intellectual probity, odd as his pronouncements might often seem. Well, sometimes politeness went by the board, for the sake of truth. His temper might be erratic, his moods as well — like his spelling, and his frequent confusion with names.

By now one might have thought he would have mastered my dog's name, 'that nice fellow Buster', a gay Scottish terrier with a withered leg who sometimes went for walks with him alone.

Buster and G.M. are bound to each other in one flurried childhood moment that still makes me hot to think of, although it also seems to me a normal reflex in someone carried away by indignation.

At tea that day in the Cloisters, G.M. was showing off to a waltz thumped out on the piano. He had been expounding on 'what a dab' he used to be at *le double Boston* and there was some discussion about the correct way to reverse, which, dancing alone, he was illustrating. But now Buster got in his way and he kicked Buster very hard, the howls were excruciating. It must have been like a stone from a sling that I hurled myself at G.M. and gave him a furious slap in the face. Everything stopped in consternation, and never out of a man's mouth opened by stupor came a larger, rounder 'OH!'

'Nancy has slapped me! Oh! It is that horrid dog's

fault — Boxer, Brewster, whatever the beastly dog is called.'

They were very angry with me indeed, far more so, once the shock over, than was G.M. On the whole he understood. Of course he should not have kicked the poor dog; but then, Bouncer should not have got in his way.

Confined to the schoolroom for two days in disgrace, I could see G.M. from the window blandly wandering about, looking at the rooks and whistling motifs from *The Ring* which he did often with great proficiency.

There were no admonitions from him about the slap; the incident was forgotten (though not by me) and it must have been soon after that he made a stand in my defence during another explosion in the household.

Creating a furore, Elinor Glyn's *Three Weeks* had just come out and there cannot have been many well-appointed houses without the novel, aptly bound in purple, containing the green-eyed lady with red hair who spent so much time on a tiger-skin. It was exciting enough quickly to inspire a privately-printed skit by the same gifted wag, Montague Eliot, who has drawn G.M. and myself on one of those walks, and *Too Weak* soon lay beside *Three Weeks* in the Morning Room.

So much talk was there of Mrs Glyn's 'audacity' that I felt I too must read about Paul and his temptress. My week with *Three Weeks* in bed in the clandestine hours of dawn was a very great enjoyment. So that was an adventure — beautiful, perfidious, dashing, and exactly what I wanted to know about! She blazed awhile across the repressions of my childhood. It also chanced that *Three Weeks* was the very first novel I read.

One of G.M.'s frequent remarks to me was 'You are so

TELEGRAMS,
MEDBOURNE

NEVILL HOLT,
MARKET HARBORO'.



Nancy takes T.M. for a pleasant walk -

by Montague Eliot

secretive', and it would be untrue to say that he, or anyone else, was a confidant, and yet. . . .

On this visit he had been put in the Knight's Room where he worked all morning. Had he been in his usual Long Room the incident might never have occurred, as one generally did not pass that way to another part of the house. His door was open, and going by on some errand during the short break in lessons, I was called in. What impelled me suddenly to tell him my secret I cannot think. We would often talk about books, although never yet about books such as this:

'So you have been reading *Three Weeks*! And what do you think of it?' he asked with real interest.

I told him it had thrilled me, but that *Too Weak*, although very unkind, had made me wonder if there were not, well, some exaggerated things in it, for of course, put that way, the story did seem absurd. We must have talked for twenty minutes, while I asked myself how severely punished I should be if the matter were discovered.

Discovered it was and on the spot; the governess happening to pass by stopped unseen, took in the conversation and the result exploded that afternoon: Nancy has been reading *Three Weeks*!

Astonishment and annoyance soon passed into uproar because G.M. came out firmly on my side, and as I stood there crimson with defiance, saying 'Why not? Why not?' there was an increasing vehemence in all his words:

'What is the harm in that, will you kindly tell me? Why should she not read *Three Weeks*? It may not be good literature, but what possible harm can come to her from

reading it? I strongly advise you not to thwart her curiosity, which is a natural thing, for you will only drive it underground. What possible harm can there be? She is not a silly girl. . . .’

‘But she’s not yet twelve years old!’ was the indignant reply.

Above all, he was in a pothole lest I should think he had given me away. Oh my Lord! he adjured me, surely I would not go and imagine that? Indeed no, I assured him; besides, the ugly eavesdropping had come out meanwhile. This was one of the times when he was an ally against authority; it greatly endeared him to me, and of course we were in disgrace together for days. Only years later did I come upon the reference to his own first clandestine discovery in literature, which he never told me himself. He has written of it in his *Confessions of a Young Man* and in his Introduction to *Pure Poetry*; it is also in Hone’s *Life*.

When he was about thirteen, Miss Braddon’s famous *Lady Audley’s Secret* was much discussed, and G.M. stole into his father’s dressing-room for the novel, which he read ‘eagerly, passionately, vehemently’. The incident gave him confidence in his instincts. Henceforward he would only know what he wanted to know, says Hone.

SIX

'Look at G.M. in a peek-a-boo shirt!' blithely exclaimed the hostess one hot summer day, the first time of its wearing. It was a very pretty shirt, a sort of lattice of tiny holes, an airy framework of mesh, doubtless American. The term had to be explained to him (no one had ever heard it before) and then he had to be reassured: *not* too much white flesh was visible, the shirt was meant to be that way — cool.

Perhaps it was Pansy Cotton who assured him it was quite decent. Being American, who should know better than she? One of the sirens, she had a craft and a talent as well. She sang enticing arpeggios as she wielded her brush over large canvases that slowly turned into portraits (separate ones) of the hostess and myself, both dressed in satin, respectively *à la dixhuitième* and *à la Velasquez*. Stepping back to look at her work, brush poised at arm's length, a strophe of *La Bohème* still in the air, she would archly ogle G.M. and ask his opinion (a difficult thing for him to give truthfully) before applying herself anew to canvas and vocalising. I was going to wish she had painted him; yet no, although a good likeness, it might have been too lush.

About two years later, another woman painter did execute a most remarkable portrait, which now hangs near his Manet, and I am grateful to the well-known S.C.H., as Miss Sara Cecilia Harrison used to sign her-

self, for having achieved to perfection the way he looked in 1907. The date is on her picture and it was in Ireland, I suppose, that she painted this 'constant and endearing companion' — words that arise this summer as I write. My inner vision of him is unalterable and distinct; she confirms it across the years, for here he sits, with his cigar, not too grave and not too absent-minded, in a pleasant, everyday mood.

'Exactly as he looked at Holt,' I murmur, and at this point the local wine-merchant calls with his load: *Tiens, voilà une tête qui me revient!* and when I tell him 'a great Irish writer' he is sure he has seen and talked with him, but this is impossible. *En tout cas, ce Monsieur Moore* must have been a fine man of letters, the face suggests that. Done nearly fifty years ago, that painting is as much G.M. at Holt as if it had been done there.

Not difficult alone, but melancholy as well, is it to steer across the past, with never a line to turn to for aid amid the unpredictable tides of memory. How inescapably one says: 'Had someone but written down all that seemed worth while, we should now have some of G.M.'s encounters with those scholarly men of wit, Harry Cust and George Wyndham.' And here are drawings as well of Edwardian personalities that came to Holt — the elfin line of 'the artistic Duchess' (Duchess of Rutland) has been at work; look at the wasp-waist of Mrs Hope Vere, the imposing presence (black sequins all over) of Lady Clarendon, the exquisite features of Lady Lytton and cameo-face of her husband, the grandson of the novelist. A few pages later we have Ethel Leginska expounding the Leschetizsky method at the grand piano,

and of G.M. there are several more caricatures — for once not by Max Beerbohm.

The Holt Visitors Book is open, at random more signatures stand out; how many of these people were here during various years at the same time as himself:

Mrs Charles Hunter, whose name alone evokes the great Sargent portrait, friend of Henry James, friend and benefactress of G.M., in that she gave him the best book she could have chosen: the Bible. Fridtjof Nansen, the great explorer of the North Pole, remembered as a fine creative man, a striking personality. Sir Frank Swettenham, Governor of the Straits Settlements, distinctly Asiatic in appearance on account of his long affinity with Oriental cultures. John Tweed, the sculptor, and Edward Marsh, a good friend of G.M., whose great work with the Georgian poets was still ahead of him. George Street, the writer, and Reinhold von Warlich, the beautiful singer of Schumann and Schubert. Romaine Brooks and Constance Stewart Richardson, two ardent, attractive women. Rudolf Besier, the successful playwright. Perceval Landon, one of the few Europeans who had penetrated into the sacred City of Lhasa. Robert MacCameron, the American painter who portrayed me in 1911 in a Poiret dress with two large greyhounds (what will have happened to that peculiar creation by now?). Francis Meynell and Somerset Maugham. F. E. Smith (later Lord Birkenhead) and Ronald Storrs. . . . at random.

Very possibly the Duchess of Rutland did draw G.M., for they were often here together. A mystery remains: this pen-and-ink vision of him balanced on a pinnacle, fishing. It belongs to his Irish period: 'Theosophical Ides, A Modern Emmet.' On the back: 'A Widow's Mite — to

George Moore.' But who is the widow and to what do the words refer?

Ah, that ample yet laconic Visitors Book, so many of its beings and their conversation gone along with the times. Why, like some ageless recorder, was Cynthia Asquith not at work already? It is her I would choose on account of that splendid narrative gift which invests her many diaries — a long, rich sowing, harvested later into books.

Does she remember, I wonder, the week-end she was here with G.M.? It was surely one of her first grown-up visits and her name is next to his in the house-party of twelve on 5 February 1910:

The Duchess of Rutland, Geoffrey Moss, Cynthia Charteris (her name before marriage), George Moore, Violet Manners, Granby, Violet Meeking, P. Metternich, Mary Elcho, Eloise Willoughby de Ercsby, A. J. Balfour, H. Harris.

SEVEN

NOT I alone as a child delighted in G.M.; he appealed greatly to my cousin Victor in those young days of reciprocal visits between Holt and Lubenham, a few miles away. When we were together as children, Victor, two years my junior, was slightly bullied and ever encouraged by me to defy authority. He would arrive at Holt in a flurry of excited dogs leaping and barking at his bare calves, a golden-haired little boy with pink cheeks and blue, wondering eyes, thickly overclad, with heavy, clattering boots, and pretty soon we would be running the race I always won, coming up smack against G.M. taking his morning thoughts for an airing just before lunch. Knowing his delight at hearing the odd things people said, I must surely have told him how astringent Aunt Edith, Victor's mother, once startled us — then eight and six years old — at breakfast with her 'What were you two up to last night? You look like a couple of boiled owls.'

One memory, I find, stands out in Victor's mind: G.M. playing tennis in lovely white flannels against Lady Randolph Churchill (then Jennie Cornwallis-West). The word 'tennis' brings it all back. G.M. has got rather fat, and the heat, I recall, is terrific. Sweat is pouring from him as he grabs at his panama which appears to float at moments above his head, his peek-a-boo shirt flapping wide open. Something is in his way; can it be that he is cursing

or only muttering as he runs with great strides and swoops across the grass court? Flies are at him too, the unstable balance of the panama further complicated by a handkerchief tucked optimistically under the back of it. Is this tennis or acrobatics, and what, exactly, is impeding him? What else but the tennis racket! Such is my impression as I strive my best in this appalling game at high noon, partnering G.M. against the others, Jennie Cornwallis-West crouching, the better to counter his devilish service. That service is the best part of his game — a nasty underhand with a cut on it unmanageable by me. Then, oh my Lord! — down he falls, and not for the first time on that treacherous sward. Our joy then was always great; at such moments he was the oval white balloon to perfection, up again in no time, wilder yet! A few years earlier we would be playing out the endless length of croquet here, G.M., the hostess, the governess and I, near the yews fed with bullocks' blood, by the Cloisters, under the school-room windows.

In 1909 he wrote to my mother from Ireland: 'Nancy might as well write to me as do lessons,' a suggestion that will have been scoffed at by Holt. He would often break into the schoolroom in the midst of lessons (one morning in particular stands out) and say to my governess, Miss Scarth, as if pre-savouring his interruption:

'Well, here is Nancy at it, just as I expected. She is at what *I* have come to be informed about: the French irregular verbs. But there is something more pressing to-day. How do you spell *Il y a?*'

We were speechless with surprise, for G.M. spoke beautiful, idiomatic French, rolling it about in his mouth with gusto; his accent was excellent, as far as could be

from ordinary English mispronunciation. For years he had been writing French, and well-turned poems and ballads by him had appeared in that tongue. (One supposes that small corrections might be made by a French friend when necessary?) His knowledge of the language in reading, writing and conversation was wide and thorough (apparently not so thorough as it seemed) and, in terms of time, already long. Yet here all of a sudden came 'the horrid little thing that is so difficult to spell. Let me see how you write *Il y a*, Nancy!'

As for the irregular verbs . . . we would now proceed to difficult tenses like *eusse-je su*. Up would fly G.M.'s hands:

'That is quite beyond me! I shall be content with something much simpler this morning.'

Was he joking? It seems not. His French was remarkable in more ways than one — an unwittingly double-edged remark. To be erratic and yet appear thorough was one of those many contradictions. As often as not, after some locution voiced in French, he would ask: 'How do you say that in English?'

He told us often that he left France because, after eight years there (or was it ten?), he discovered he was losing his mother-tongue. French words would come to him instead; construction likewise. So much so that living in France became a danger for a man writing in English: 'One cannot do both, although a few have achieved it. Well, I cannot do both.'

(He could and he did do both, although his writing in French did not satisfy his sensitive ear entirely, nor yet his critical eye for composition.)

His search for exactitude was such that he would fall into odd tenses while we sat spell-bound, waiting for what

was coming: 'Il eut voulu que je prisse. . . .' 'No, no, Mr Moore,' said the governess; 'c'est un archaïsme, "prisse".'

The interruption might last as long as twenty minutes, and two or three times he was put of the schoolroom peremptorily.

One day he discovered that I was learning the answers to *What is Leeds famous for? And Bradford?* It threw him into a paroxysm of indignation and soon everybody was being told about it with vigour:

'What is the use of teaching the child things like that? When she is grown up and goes down to dinner on the arm of a young man, is she going to turn to him and say, "What is made in Sheffield?"'

He went on so much about it that the wares of England became one of the jokes of Holt.

Many were the walks that G.M. took with the governess and myself. Often on such occasions, at an age when I ran much and fast, I would leave them on the road breasting a stiff wind, G.M. holding on to his bowler, and be off with the dogs in the fields, catching them up in the midst of their talk on French literature, a discussion, maybe, of Barrès's *Les Déracinés*, or concerning the philosophy in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. *Maîtresse-femme* as she was, highly educated and a great reader, how out of place was Miss Scarth with so juvenile a child. She should never have been a governess (although Vita Sackville-West enjoyed her), least of all to me, who had every reason to hate her and her detestable temper, her punishments and outrageous discipline, while admiring her intellect in what, later, I would call 'a purely objective

way'. It seemed to me that G.M. noticed this disproportion in ages and natures, even if he did keep silent about it, merely dropping a hint or two, while saying that she was a remarkable woman.

The usual morning walk would be along the road to Drayton as far as the top of a steep hill, a mile and a quarter from Holt. Here the land falls away on one side in a great, rolling expanse, a gigantic flank tufted with gorse-bushes. On the left of the road were ditches that attracted me; in one of them a hollow thickly overhung, somehow became 'my house'. I would run ahead to be there two minutes or so before, catching me up, Miss Scarth called me to follow. But a house must have contents, and these I thought of as 'works of art': some oddly curved root, a stick stripped of its bark, the wood gleaming with polishing, a few of those fierce sea-green flints stacked by the road, a beautiful shard of pottery, a small blue, empty medicine-bottle picked up unseen.

Somehow this harmless fancy had to be kept dark, so many things being forbidden that I developed a sense of what would become so. Yet one day — that will certainly have been when we were alone — I showed it to G.M. Now why, said he, could I want such a 'house'? I told him that I liked to make or invent things of my own, ready, should he mock me, with the explanation that one could shelter here from the wind. No sneerer at fancies was he — the flints attracted him too — and murmuring that I was a funny child of nine (or was it ten years old now?) he ambled on.

Another time, a year or two later, should we go down Drayton hill? I asked. No; Let us sit here awhile and look

at the strangely Italianate landscape across the valley, he said. Italianate? Yes. Because that little village, Bringhurst, sits on its small, round hill in the way the Italian painters of the Renaissance arranged the hamlets in the background of their pictures, sometimes not more than a suggestion in a mist. And there, to the left, is Castle Rockingham, a sturdy place, at which the cannons of Cromwell were once fired from Holt, he had just been told. And far beyond are those — what did you call them, Nancy? — those ‘night-fires’ in the sky when it is dark, above the foundries at Corby. His thoughts were drawn to the romance of industrialism and led him to tell me about the Potteries. For, said he, when you have a story in mind you must be acquainted with its background. That background must be seen, so that it can be re-created, otherwise the story will lack tone and character. Well, that had been at the time *A Mummer’s Wife* was coming to him. Some town in the Potteries would make a good setting for the start. So he went there, to Hanley, and took Arnold Bennett with him.

How beautifully he talked, while, sitting long that afternoon at the top of Drayton hill, we saw Bringhurst slowly emerge from the mist — to this day, as an all-too-rare return there shows, a touch of Italy in the Midlands.

We must have got into the gorse on the hilltop at least once, for all that expanse was enticing and it was here, I told him, that I had been ‘blooded’ out hunting, at the age of six or so, and given the fox’s brush. His love of exploring landscape was as great as my love of discovery. We certainly walked and climbed and scrambled all over Ironstone more times than one, peering into dingles in the

great ring of abandoned quarry, slithering down scarpy slopes, pausing in front of the outbursts of wild rose-bushes, fascinated by large fragments of machinery emerging from tough, high grass in a fine apotheosis of rust. The dingles made him tell me of a noble work, for it was into a dingle (the word sprang to his lips in the tangle of Ironstone) that Isopel Berners drew George Borrow, and the two volumes about the gorgio making friends with the gypsies, *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*, should soon be a present, a promise he kept indeed. They were books that remained dear to him to the end of his life.

A glorious place, Ironstone! There was no difficulty at all, said he, in seeing why gypsies should often camp here and picnics be spread near the clumps of eglantine. But when and why did the quarry come to be abandoned? The workings seemed important. We would look close at the stones and flakings — an angry, reddish suffusion in some, violet veinings in others, the miraculous colouring of a mineral palette. More stone than iron, though. Of course that was why. Everything comes to an end, said he, thinking he could scent a sad story to the day the whole enterprise was given up because of the poor quality of the ore.

There was another attraction to Ironstone if one went but a little further: Adam the potter, a very old man, blind from birth. A quarter of a mile below the quarry he sat at his wheel in a hut, working it with his foot, turning shapes out of great gobs of wet clay, sluicing water over them as he began and finished his pots before your eyes with his veteran, sure hand, and then severed them from the lathe with a piece of wire to set them in rows to dry. All the garden pottery at Holt was his work, after it had

been baked in the kiln next to his shed. Adam was a great theme for G.M., who held craftsmanship in high honour, deploring the lack of character in 'the horrid articles that are machine-made'.

Not many were those I took to Ironstone — a fierce, wild place that had something ominous about it and something holy in a pagan way; of these G.M. was by far the most appreciative. On all our walks, despite his town suit and bowler hat, save in hottest summer when he was driven to a Panama and shirt-sleeves, it was clear he was country-born, and, up to a point, despite these vestiges of urbanism, country-bred — a thing, praise be, that you never lose.

There is a great deal about the Irish country in his books, how often written of as if he were re-discovering it, which is but true, for he never lived at Moore Hall after he left it for Paris. It was his brother the Colonel who lived there, and G.M. would sometimes visit him. About 1909 the Colonel had been 'making improvements', although G.M. was already convinced that the day of the estates in Ireland was over and would not return. Well, it seems that a new gate was wanted, and remembering the handsome gates made by my father at Holt, G.M. wrote me about this:

'Tell him I am writing to him for advice about a gate — a gate my brother is putting up at Moore Hall. I am leaving Ireland and shall never see the gate again. (I propose to go and see it.) You will ask what is the use of putting up a new entrance gate to a place which I am leaving for ever. The only answer is that the world is full of foolish people and your affectionate friend George Moore is one of them.'

EIGHT

THERE was talk at one time at Holt of a tame fox. It brought a frown, I remember, into several of the county faces. A *tame* fox? In a kennel, on a chain, perhaps? Really, really, Mr Moore! Foxes are not made to be tamed. You couldn't do it, no matter how hard you tried. Come now, Mr Moore!

Well of course, G.M. conceded, this is Leicestershire. But indeed there was a tame fox, in Germany, with whom he had been on excellent terms. 'The fox he has written about in *Ave*,' someone remembered later.

Although country neighbours might half-disapprove of him, they had to admit that he put things in a funny way — if that sort of way appealed to you. On the whole, the ladies thought him funnier than did the gentlemen; having met him already, some of them might be on their guard, because he had a nasty way of tripping a man up with one of his unexpected retorts, in front of everybody. A bit salacious too, wasn't he, sometimes? Hardly drawing-room conversation, what he said about the bullocks, for instance. What was it he said? The things were jumping about in a field, getting up stupidly on to each others' backs, you know, as they do. Moore was looking at them and he said: 'Poor bullock, poor bullock — he would like to, but he can't.' And he also said he'd spent half his life wondering what on earth *braces* could be for Preposterous! This sort of thing must be a pose.

While the country gentlemen were warming their coat-tails at the fire, storming against the Old Age Pensions proposed by damned radicals, and all the nonsense that women now called 'their rights', G.M. would be railing in another part of the room against the enemies of free expression in the arts: prudery and hypocrisy. Fig-leaves, it seems, were coming in again, and in Rome the finest statues of antiquity . . . oh, it didn't bear thinking about. The partisans of 'the flying towel' . . . He got no further. Would he mind explaining? Well, that arrangement — you would hardly call it a cloud — springing from somewhere unaccountably, in a group of marble or bronze figures, just in the convenient place on the male figure. It was all right, if concessions had to be made, for a clock on the mantel-piece; but fig-leaves on works by Phidias and Praxiteles, in museums fortunate enough to possess such masterpieces?

The talk settling on sculpture, he would give Rodin a great deal of praise, particularly for his *Victor Hugo*. Many artists, said he, now held that Rodin was the only great sculptor since antiquity. It was obvious that no other was doing work of such importance, and any patron of the arts in England with money sufficient should certainly acquire a Rodin while the old man's hand and eye were still firm and full of vigour. Rodin was much in his mind and a letter of his says that 'motor-cars and hunters are passing things and drop into wreckage. But a bust outlasts Rome.'

People wanted to hear about G.M.'s life in Ireland. Did he think he would live there for ever? The Celtic Renaissance must be very absorbing? Was there a good hotel in Dublin? Sometimes he would turn a vacuous eye

on to it all, murmuring 'No', as it were, to everything. If he was in a good mood, that little ditty he had made up might be vouchsafed:

*The meals in the Shelbourne Hotel
Make one wish one were dead and in hell.*

I have forgotten the rest of this answer to one of the questions. He worked in Dublin every day, he said, with a secretary who was entirely satisfactory; they began at 10.30, ended at 5.30. Yes, every day she took down his dictation, and he often re-wrote the whole thing afterwards. But he did not spend the whole year in Ireland. He had just been to Paris, for instance, to hear the new French opera, *Ariane et Barbe-bleue*, a fine work; he had also been to a revival there of the 'Paris' version of *Tannhäuser*, changing his mind about the music, which he now found full of inspiration, Wagner being rich in surprises, no matter how well one might think one knew him.

This was about the time he paid a visit to George Meredith, accompanied by my mother. Well, he had come to the conclusion that Meredith was best as a poet, far better than as a novelist; the stuff of poetry remains ever in the poet, and the best thing in his novels was the poetic thought he brought into them.

And he would talk of Swinburne, the two being already twin names in literature. Of course much of Swinburne was fine, surging poetry full of passion; but it must also be said that a good deal he had written was '*une roue qui tourne à vide*'. Oh, but this could not apply to *The Sundew* — a darling poem. And he would quote some of its verses from memory. *The Sundew* was one of the first poems he told me, how rightly, to admire.

The strenuous character of our walks now outgrown, no panting G.M. was led in by me any longer to the tea-table with an impertinent 'We're not late, after all!' At fourteen I felt studious, went to classes in London and read a good deal; my first poems had been written four years earlier.

Suddenly memory contracts at this point, and it is in a haze I see him, and hear him not at all. He was certainly here once — it may have been more often, for he sometimes forgot to sign the Visitors Book — when Josef Holbrooke arrived on his explosive motor-bicycle, a tweeded dynamo turning full spate in a Gaelic swirl of waves, wood-wind and brasses, plans for operas and orchestral compositions of great scope, with the generous backing of Lord Howard de Walden. The conjunction of Holbrooke and Herbert Trench in *Apollo and the Seaman* was already musical history; *Dylan, son of the Wave* in gestation or active making; legend and music were certainly much discussed. It seems to me that G.M. had some difficulty with Holbrooke's music, although the interplay of assonance, dissonance and the strange new harmonies did not unmitigatedly obstruct his interest. This Gaelic Revival followed a little soon, perhaps, on the Irish Renaissance, and maybe he whispered prudence; whatever the reason, Holbrooke thought him 'old womanish'. The Welsh mist round *Dylan*, with *The Children of Don* in the offing, yields up nothing more tangible.

Not only Wagner (as has been erroneously said) occupied the musical part of G.M.'s mind, although it was Wagner who dominated, and he was off to Bayreuth several times from Ireland; the descriptions of Bayreuth with 'dear Edward' are among the best pages in *Ave*. Now,

in September 1910, he went with my mother and several others to the Wagner performances in Munich, where one night after the *Walküre*, a terrible street accident nearly put an end to both their lives, killing one, possibly two others, severely hurting several more.

Since there are men all over the world interested in him and his writing, maybe it is not more remarkable that a letter should come from Honolulu than from anywhere else; what is striking, to me, is the coincidence at this moment. A stranger, Dr Pleadwell, has written, without the slightest possibility of knowing I am engaged on these pages, to ask if I remember the date of the accident. The date, no, but the fact and the horror of it. And there arose the sudden memory of 'the print of the tyre of the car' down all the length of one of G.M.'s legs. Very often he put no date whatever on his letters, and it is Dr Pleadwell who has tracked this down, sending me subsequently a copy of G.M.'s spirited account (now in his possession, I presume) to his secretary, Miss Gough. It was to be made public in Ireland, he told her.

They were standing in the street when a drunken German chauffeur drove his car violently over the pavement, mowing down people all around; thieves appeared and robbed the victims of their money and jewellery. He says that none escaped as lightly as he; his legs were not broken, his last moment did not come. When he looked at his clothing later, he found wheel-studs patterned in mud all along one leg. And that escape, he tells Miss Gough, must be attributed to the miraculous providence that intended he should live because *Hail and Farewell* is not yet finished. Some splendid remarks follow about superstition — a deplorable thing for the multitude but an

engaging one individually — the dislike of him (even subconscious dislike, he says) in the Catholic world and the wish to suppress his writings may well have been the occult cause of the accident. And not of that accident alone, but of the previous one he escaped from in the Rue Pierre Charron in Paris. His belief in a shielding providence leads him to say that there may be a third attempt; it will not succeed because his work is important to humanity, and Nature, although erratic in her ways, attains her ends by guarding her instruments from harm.

NINE

ONE of the richest memories of G.M. at Holt is a whole series of discussions — some of them full of laughter, and others ending in verbal violence, on the score of what he was pleased to call 'Papistry'. Well, it was all around him in Ireland, he would say; there was always 'dear Edward' too (that fervent Catholic, Edward Martyn) one of his best friends, with whom he was in constant conflict. There was religious conflict as well with his brother, the Colonel.

As I learned history and came upon the word 'Popery' it seemed no more archaic a word than G.M.'s 'Papistry' and gradually I perceived the sarcasm in his term, coming to understand that it was not a sincere religious faith but the Catholic *dogma* that annoyed him so greatly — with all its miracles, power of Rome, undue ascendancy of the priests in Ireland, threats of hellfire and soul's damnation unless. . . . That 'unless', what was it but a threat, in some countries even spiritual blackmail?

He was perfectly willing to argue on a serious plane; his verbal traps for 'papists' were most ingeniously laid, and his theory, as one reads in *Salve*, that the Catholic dogma is the enemy of good literature is set out at great length and can be epitomised in these words:

'It must be clear to anybody who will face the question without prejudice that the mind petrifies if a circle be drawn around it and it can hardly be denied that dogma draws a circle round the mind.' And, 'My main conten-

tion is that the Catholic may not speculate; and the greatest literature has come out of speculations upon the values of life.'

Any of these serious discussions might suddenly be enriched with flippancies about 'miracles and mum-mery'. 'The magicians and their box of tricks' generally led to 'You cannot turn God into a biscuit'. And now, he exclaimed one day, here was some very disturbing news from America: the United States might soon go entirely dry! What would they do about Holy Communion wine if Prohibition came in? If the holy blood were represented by some brand of coloured mineral water, how would the consciences of Catholics reconcile themselves to *that*?

He had been educated at Oscott, near Birmingham, the Roman Catholic College, which he thoroughly detested. Like other children, he had been taught from the Bible, but complained that his parents would never discuss anything in it with him. 'Horribly irreligious', one or two of the guests at Holt would be heard muttering, only to be told that one might as well protest against the astringency of a lemon as take objection to G.M.'s well-known views. Was he so anti-Catholic because he felt himself a Protestant at heart? G.M. would reply in the vein of what he told the Colonel in *Salve*:

'One doesn't become a Protestant, one discovers oneself to be a Protestant, and I discovered in those days that magicians and their sacraments estranged me from all religious belief, instead of drawing me closer to it.'

And yet he read the lessons in church at Holt, it may even have been twice, read them beautifully, I remember, having much to say afterwards about the noble style of the English.

Well teased about it he was: Moore, the agnostic, reading the lessons to the villagers! Well, he would counter, he was a respecter of people's beliefs, and there was no one else that day to read the lessons. Moreover, he was quite friendly with some of the priests in Ireland. As for the portrait of the simple country father in 'A Letter to Rome', one of the tales in *The Untilled Field* — is that a hostile picture of a man?

Although his audiences were more or less chosen for these discussions and no individual offence meant, his views were not always taken as they might have been — as one of his idiosyncracies, as one of the contradictions in him. For indeed, his preoccupation with the Christian story is an extraordinary thing for such a freethinker. His journey to the Holy Land, on behalf of *The Brook Kerith*, was to come, as were the two plays it fathered, *The Apostle* and *The Passing of the Essenes*. The whole of *Ave, Salve, Vale* is rich in priests and religious discussions that are sometimes angry ones; *The Untilled Field* is full of conscience and Catholicism, as are *Sister Teresa* and *The Lake*. Nominalism and Realism are debated at length in *Héloïse and Abélard* — religion, Christianity, Catholicism all the way! 'Half or more of this man's life was spent in examining and thinking about the effects on men and women of faith or unbelief' seems a fairer assessment than the mere word 'irreligious'.

All the same. . . .

'Really, G.M.!' said the hostess very angrily one day; 'can't you be more tactful? Miss X is the daughter of one of the great Catholic families of England, and you know it. And yet you go walking with her and upset her thoroughly with your nonsense about "turning God into a

biscuit" and ridiculous things like that. She is very upset indeed. She went straight to her room when you came in from walking and she hasn't appeared since. She may even insist on leaving the house immediately. What makes you say such things when you know you are going to annoy somebody? One would imagine you thought of nothing but "Papistry", as you call it.'

The most astute theological disputations being obviously of no avail, G.M., after a few pallid excuses, remained silent and was in disgrace for several days. 'Your mother was so angry with me on account of that silly young woman', he told me years later when we were talking of times at Holt, 'that she walked up and down the carpet like a wounded panther!'

He had better luck with a little French story that had taken his fancy. The French, said he, have a sane attitude towards religion, a good many of them: 'I like to picture that coster-fellow who went to pray in a church and got so engrossed as he knelt there that he forgot about the time. When the verger tapped him on the shoulder to tell him to leave, he arose in great anger, saying "*Quand j'élève mon âme à Dieu, JE NE VEUX PAS QU'ON M'EMMERDE.*" Don't you like the contrast between the fellow's apparent piety and the rough word at the end?'

T E N

SOMEONE might ask G.M. why he went to live in Ireland and would hear that his disgust, anger and dismay at the Boer War, which he felt to be deeply unjust, was partly the cause; the jingo-imperialism it aroused had driven him from England. This coincided with his response to a call, and that call had come from Ireland. It would be a fine thing to help give Ireland a literature of her own, a contemporary literature — which should be in the Irish tongue. He did not know Irish, that was the difficulty. What a great thing for Ireland to have the use of her own language again. How to promote, to encourage the general use of it? No language could exist without a literature of its own.

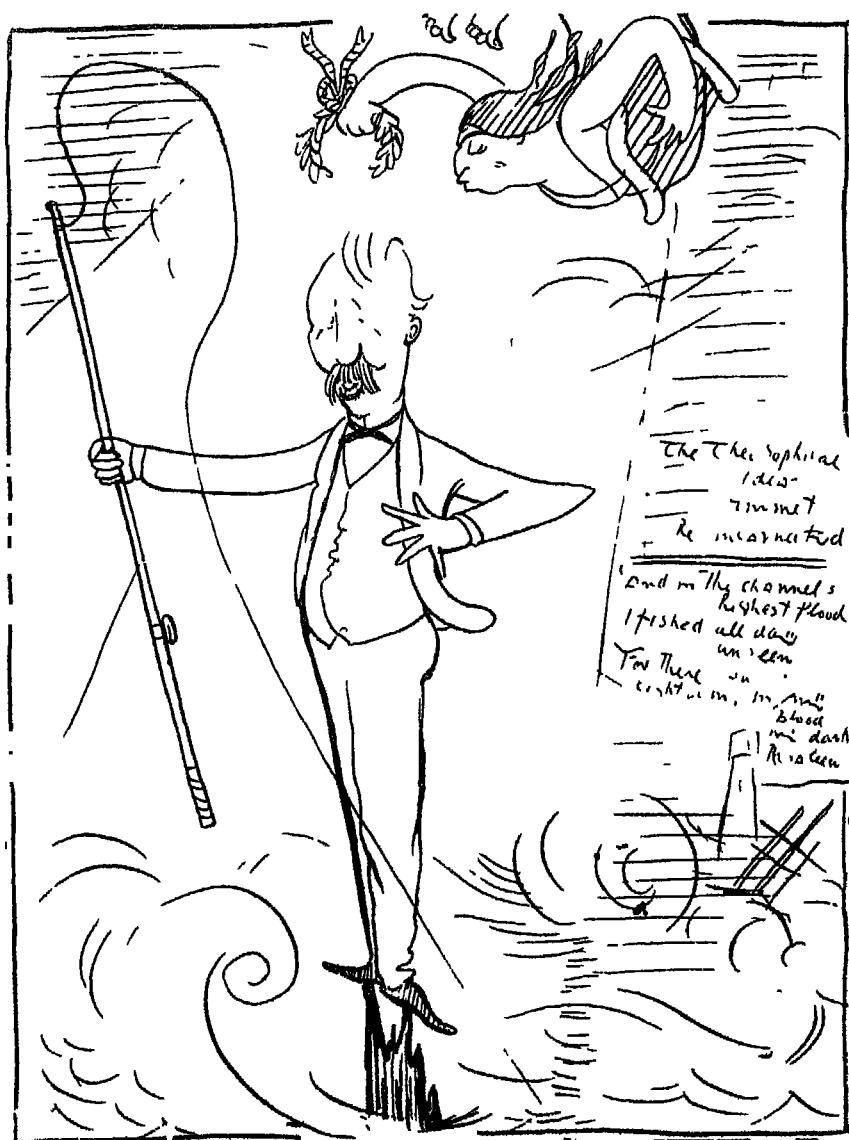
The subject is treated at length in *Salve* and I remember much talk of it at Holt, when a good deal was said about Yeats as well. *Ave* and *Salve* were soon to appear — in 1911 and 1912 — and both recall numerous conversations there about the Gaelic League and the Irish Renaissance. ‘To what better purpose can a man’s energy be devoted, and his talents, than the resurrection of his country’s language?’ are words in *Salve* that were certainly said at Holt.

It was all rather fantastic. Most peculiar was G.M.’s collaboration with Yeats in the writing of *Diarmuid and Grania*, a play which, they agreed, ought to be in Irish, yet neither of them knew the language. Rightly wanting a

Folk-Theatre, Yeats — and G.M. — then thought it should be in dialect. The narration would follow of what is so wittily written in *Ave*, the awful discussions between them about the style of the dialogue: Grania is a king's daughter; how then would she be speaking folk-Irish? he objected to Yeats. The matter grew more and more tangled until, driven mad with it all, what should he exclaim one day but that he would rather write the thing in French! Taken at his word was he. It was in the middle of the night Yeats came to sit on the sleeping man's bed, awakening him with further admonitions and pressing him to go ahead: by all means write the play in French. It would then be put into English by Lady Gregory, said Yeats; given to an expert, Taidgh O'Donoghue, to translate into Irish; turned back into English-Irish by Lady Gregory; lastly, Yeats would 'put style to it', adding, deleting and doing here and there what he thought fit.

Was ever work envisaged in such manner — a fivefold labour, at four removes from the original by Moore, the subject an ancient Irish legend fitted by him into a new French dress? Oh, but that was not all. He had actually started on it, gone to France so as to be in the right atmosphere — the sound of the idiom, at least, would be around him — he had hammered out a long scene (it is at the end of *Ave*) in a language, said he, that a Frenchman would recognise as French, and then, a sudden light shining on to the folly of it all, had put the manuscript into his pocket to keep as a testimony of 'what a damned fool a clever man like Yeats can be when he is in the mood to be a fool'.

Well, G.M. and his Irish friends in Dublin had gone on thinking what Ireland should be given in the way of a



G. M.'s Irish Period, artist unknown

masterpiece; something, for the moment, would have to be translated into Irish, one of the world's great books, and the thought that came — it must be a book that would appeal to a great many people — was a rendering of *The Arabian Nights*. That would be an admirable work to start with.

1910 was his last Irish year. Slowly and sadly he had come to feel that the Irish language could not be revived, and, in a letter to his French friend Edouard Dujardin, he tells him, in 1908, of this conviction: 'The Celtic Renaissance does not exist, it is a myth.'

The talk would run on — of Ireland and the Irish, of language, speech and writing, G.M. holding that English was in a decline. No more 'thee' and no more 'thou' — a great loss. These thoughts in *Salve* were certainly voiced by him at Holt:

'True that the English language has never been much in the kitchen nor in the vineyard, but it has been spoken in the dales and along the downs, and there is a finer breeze in it than there is in French, and a bite in it like Elizabethan ale — all the same, a declining language; thee and thou have been lost beyond hope of restoration, and many words that I remember in common use are now nearly archaic; a language wearied with child-bearing, and I pondered the endless poetry of England, and admitted English literature to be the most beautiful, Boer War or no Boer War.'

And then someone would ask him what he thought of the general standard of education, the progress that was being made on a national scale by the schools.

By the schools! They were ruining the language with their standardisation! 'Rural English is being destroyed by

the Board Schools; and God help the writer who puts pen to paper in fifty years time for all that will be left of the language will be a dry shankbone that has been lying about for a long while on the dust-heap of empire,' he wrote in *Vale*. I can hear his voice yet rolling out the words 'Board Schools'.

'George Moore, Henry Tonks, Howard de Walden, Herbert Trench', says the Visitors Book for an early date in August 1910; Moore and Mallock (as often before) were also here together on August 23rd. These subjects I remember so well were discussed at great length between them all. Here also, on both dates, was the brilliant young pianist, Vernon Warner, whose daily output of Chopin and Schumann was impressive. Harmony making for harmony, the lyrical flights and chromatic thunders were not only compelling, but dispelled the acidity that often arose from protracted discussions about Art.

'A novelist who trailed a wisp of hair round a bald head' are the words, or nearly the words, that G.M. had for W. H. Mallock. He would laugh sometimes at the author of *The New Republic*, which made Mallock famous, but would often be laughing with Mallock as well, or teasing him about the idyllic simplicity of life in his novel, the hunger that could be assuaged by the picking of bread from the bread-fruit tree in that Republic.

Mallock came very often to Holt, a part-malicious, part-kindly little tub of a man, with intelligent brown eyes, as I remember him, wishing I remembered very much more. (I must have been very small at the time of his first visits, jumping about in excitement, else why would he once have called me 'the flea'?) Of speculation

to G.M. was Mallock's dread of his elaborate visiting-plans being disarranged by a change of even a few hours. Fanatically 'social' was he not? Trains, arrivals, departures, had been worked out for weeks and weeks ahead. What, G.M. wanted to know, what happened to Mallock if a hostess threw them out by half a day? He must be in agony at the very thought, he would be completely lost. 'Ye-es, ye-es, *oh ye-es*', he would mimic the little man's propitiating voice and decide he was sometimes rather a bore, although there was a good deal to be said for him and his *New Republic*; that bread-fruit tree was a real find. And it was certainly not Mallock but someone new to Holt and over-deferential to him who happened to use the same words, more or less in the same manner, that brought G.M. back one day from a long walk 'in a passion' which exploded to me as he wiped his brow: "Ye-es, ye-es, Mr Moore, *oh yes*; qui-te, qui-te, Mr Moore; ye-es, ye-es; qui-te, qui-te". My Lord! He said it so often I felt I could dash me head against the stones!

Bored apart, and they were summarily dealt with by him, G.M. took a very partisan line about many people and many subjects; the flaming rows he had with several friends were widely known, although I seem not to have grasped or else have forgotten the whys and wherefores of those with Whistler, with Sir William Eden, with Lord Howard de Walden. Rows about literary collaboration, about art and letters; rows that might appear to come partly from jealousy; the lengthy, even permanent one with his brother, the Colonel, on the score of Catholicism — rows unforgiven by him, rows that petered out, an exchange with the opponent of malices great and small. He had the capacity of sometimes being able to

laugh at himself once the smart was over, and his delight at the discomfiture of anyone he considered pompous, fallacious or second-rate was untempered.

At times long, acrimonious discussions would arise on the score of painting, of the painting that was being done in England and elsewhere, in much of which G.M. saw nothing but 'lack of form' or stupid vulgarity. Comment and dissent would soon be surging like the waves of the sea, sometimes between himself and one scathing protagonist and sometimes in a concourse of people gradually dominated by the vehemence of his argument. Even in early schoolroom days I knew, by reproductions, the famous pictures in European museums; no anger flowed over the Old Masters, but the contemporaries caught it badly. As they were then unknown to me, it is impossible to recall which of them most aroused his scorn. It was still a time when the Impressionists might raise a critical eyebrow, although hardly anyone would dare argue with him about them. G.M.'s love of the fine use Manet made of black and white was frequently voiced; it even led, one year, to my being shod in black patent-leather slippers and white socks. There was talk of Whistler, whom he had known well and, one art leading to another, he had much to say about Wagner and Nietzsche, Balzac and Flaubert (whom he seemed to admire at that time more than any other writer, his *Madame Bovary* in particular) about Turgenev, Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Baudelaire (Rimbaud being very little mentioned) — about Gautier, de Goncourt, Villiers de l'Isle Adam and Heredia, and, indeed, Maupassant too — safe ground and pleasant for the unimpeded progress of his thoughts. But when it

came to contemporary painting the atmosphere grew electric, the argument often rushing to a sudden end, a brilliant finale or a phrase cut in two. That well-known pout of his would then set in lengthily and it might be in gloom and dudgeon we started on one of our walks. The beauty of the countryside or his sense of humour presently took his mind out of the thorns, as on the occasion when he went on chuckling to himself and then said to me:

‘No good whatever can come out of these silly arguments. It is either good painting or it is bad painting, and no words of mine or of anyone else’s will alter *that*. I was trying to tell your mother this just now, quoting two artists whose opinion she certainly respects. But I did not get very far, because. . . “Well”, I said to her, “all this fuss about that garish Academy picture. I don’t know what Stynx and Stonx would have to say to *that*.” Your mother went into a peal of laughter, and when it was over, she asked me what on earth I was talking about. Of course I was only trying to say Steer and Tonks. One gets mixed up with one’s names sometimes.’

That art should be used for purposes of self-advancement made him very angry, and it was with delight that he went about recounting the misadventure which had befallen a famous critic who did not enjoy his esteem and whom he considered a snob.

A new quattrocento Italian painting had been discovered by this authority but some doubt seemed to exist; was it authentic? The controversy raged until someone thought of obtaining the opinion of a different kind of expert, a craftsman in wood. Could he tell, from the condition of the painted panel if the work was really ancient? The man thought he could. And when he had

examined the picture he said without hesitation: 'About fifty years old, I expect. What's more, I can also tell you what the wood is.'

'And of course', G.M. would pursue, 'when the carpenter came out with the words "American hornbeam", there was consternation in one camp and jubilation in the other. How is the critic going to live that down? Khk, Khk, Khk.'

E L E V E N

It was in the spring of 1911 that G.M. left Dublin to live in London once more, the house-parties at Holt were coming to an end and I now saw much less of him, being busy with day-classes and soon sent abroad to Munich and Paris for further studies.

On our last walks at Holt he would talk to me about French painting and English poetry. I had shown him a few of my own poems and was reading some of his books, comparing his writing with that of other contemporaries and finding nothing else like it. As for his preoccupation with style — one could see his signature on every page.

But I could not follow him at all when it came to 'objective verse'. A baffling word, in this context, is 'objective', until suddenly one has understood.

'Shelley's *Hymn of Pan* is objective, what a beautiful poem it is, Nancy. And *Kubla Khan*, and Poe's exquisite lines *To Helen*. Perhaps the finest poetry is objective, in French as well.'

And he would quote from memory the delicious *Sonnet en Quatorze Mots*, breathing it out in a hush of admiration:

Fort

Belle

Elle

Dort;

Sort

89

*Frêle,
Quelle
Mort.
Rose
Close,
La
Brise
L'a
Prise.*

Objective verse being already much in his mind, thirteen years and maybe longer before his anthology *Pure Poetry* was published, he urged me to help him in finding 'objective' poems throughout the whole of English literature that might be made into a volume, while I remained unable to grasp the difference between objective and subjective poetry.

Part of a letter has survived:

Hôtel St James et d'Albany, Paris, May 1912

I suppose you are too young to write 'pure poetry', poetry about things, but remember that that is the only poetry that lasts. You remember our unmade anthology. The Hymn to Pan, Shakespeare's songs, etc., Gautier's sonnet to the tulip:

'Moi je suis la tulipe, une fleur de Hollande'

One truth I have gathered and it is, that the artist should avoid sentiment as he would the plague — sentiment passes away like the clouds. There is not a tear in Shakespeare; and what is most strange is that this age, into which sentiment hardly enters at all, will only read sentimental books and look at sentimental pictures. It is difficult to define sentiment. Perhaps you will understand why I am writing

this to you better if I say that 'ideas' are the banc of modern literature.

'Not a tear. . . .' Has the unsentimentality of Shakespeare ever been put that way before?

Part Two

TWELVE

WHEN G.M. moved from Dublin to Ebury Street he found himself living, by some curious chance, in that very street where the voice had spoken to him for the second time, at the end of last century, bidding him offer himself to Ireland.

His house, No 121 (now transformed into apartments and the office of the Finnish Airways), was a prepossessing little house in this long, unpretentious street — which he once complained of to me as being 'lacklustre' — and is of nice proportions from top to basement. His bedroom was on the second floor front above the harmoniously-arranged drawing-room, its eighteenth-century furniture complemented with some early-Victorian pieces of fine quality. The breakfast room as he sometimes called it (to me simply *the room*) was on the ground floor. Here he sat much, saw most of his visitors and also worked a good deal. The long, pleasant room had an agreeable bow-window on the street; you could not see into it from without but were perceived by G.M. from within. At the other end, a window opening on to a small space made the room agreeably light. In it were many of his beautiful and valuable paintings.

The large, long table covered with a piece of stuff was often strewn with papers, proofs and typescript, never in quantity or confusion sufficient to prevent easy removal for the laying of lunch, tea or dinner, for of course this

was the dining-room as well. With surprise I say it, seeing thereby how much the room could change. There was a good deal of atmosphere to it, with a touch of the last century as in the rest of the house, and this recalls the fact that he would not have a telephone, his horror of 'the beastly thing' being inalienable.

Here he sat, how often in that day-dream so often mentioned in his books; I have come upon him thus myself. Here he was brisk, witty, testy, sulky or amiable with visitors, or angrily and energetically dealing with that time-devouring correspondence which is inseparable from the making of books. Here he gazed half a-doze into the winter fire, springing up with a sudden thought for the page just laid aside in revision, or some 'find', like one of those ideas that would send him leaping from bed to writing-table — the waking thought of morning.

Outside this room was the narrow passage leading to the front door two or three yards away, and, in the opposite direction, down three or four steps towards something indistinct: the small study, where all the dictating was done. He was issuing thence the morning I arrived a little early for lunch (to him 'breakfast'). In that small back room, a very den, goes on the 'composing', the groundwork of all he writes. The dictation is sometimes dismissed by him as hardly more than the daily oiling of the machine; a few hours later his pen runs through most of the lines on all these pages the secretary has taken down, and new words, new trains of thought, replace them. Often the whole thing is scrapped; the real thing begins, but only *begins*, with the re-writing, after the secretary has left, just before lunch; she returns next day, about ten. (I should have liked to have known her, but saw her only

once.) And then comes a great deal more than the search for the right word. It is sometimes 're-casting' and sometimes 're-moulding' (there was a considerable difference to him between the two) and fifty pages may go to the devil at any moment, even when the thing appears to be nearly finished. Revising is going on all the time — and never were better words pronounced (his words) than 'It is only by writing in vain that the subject becomes part of oneself' — a draconic, heroic truth, a Spartan encouragement as well, if courage enough in the writer there be.

Was it revision until the pages seemed to him incapable of improvement down to the last comma? By no means. He has affirmed that the sight of proofs came as 'an inspiration' to his pen. At last all was done and, as he once said to me: 'About twenty-five books, not more, should be expected of an author. In the lifetime of a writer, if it be a long one, are about twenty-five books. He should not ask more of himself.'

Almost every time I went to Ebury Street I would look carefully at his pictures. Twenty-five years have passed since I saw him — and the room — for the last time and many of them have left my memory for ever.

They were famous. He had bought two or three of the Impressionists for a friend, the most important one being for the Lord Grimthorpe of that time, who ended by not wanting it, so G.M. kept for himself this 'grey portrait by Manet' of the artist's mother, a painting of supreme quality. But the other Manet, the *Etude* now mine, which is somewhat larger, when and where did he buy it? Could Manet have given it him? Does its acquisition date from the days when the artist drew and painted him so often?

Did he come by it later? Not an indication can I find. The third of his most important pictures was the 'Mauve Morning by Monet' as he called it, of willows in a submerged meadow, the trees done in strong lines within the mist. Of the two Berthe Morisots, *La Leçon de Couture* and *La Femme à la Tasse à Thé*, both of the same size and in the same blue, green and yellow colouring, one would say that they were full of grace, excellent drawing-room pictures. There was a handsome David, the portrait of an elderly woman in black with an admirably painted white ruching about the head; a sun-filled Guillaumin of a farmstead amid trees (now mine); and a Mark Fisher, *The Land of Wine and Song*. All these were exhibited in 1940 and 1942 at the National Gallery. His Conder was a delight, a woman on a balcony at Brighton, and there was a small Constable. I remember well two portraits of him, but surely there was a third — a Mark Fisher? The Orpen portrait we would sometimes call 'the green and yellow melancholy'; the other, by Miss Harrison, what a magnificent 'catch' of a likeness! On the stairs hung a Steer, a fine Degas pastel and several good drawings.

And, covering the entire floor in *the* room, was the Aubusson carpet that had shocked AE so dreadfully twenty years earlier in Dublin, as is beautifully told at the beginning of *Salve* when G.M. shows AE his pictures. He seemed to like none of them; he looked as if he were about to ask G.M. to burn the Aubusson, on account of its colour and great, assertive roses.

It was in April 1911 that G.M. moved into Ebury Street, but I do not remember him there until his return from the Holy Land in 1914. Yet there is a letter to a

friend saying that I went to say good-bye to him just before he started on his quest for landscape, without which *The Brook Kerith* could not possibly be written.

He was then sixty-two and he went alone. It was not a very long absence; about a month perhaps, and his letters to various friends are very lively about it all. He was going to order 'camels and concubines — 50 of one, 300 of the other' — but that was at the start of the journey (a touch of visions-of-the-Orient) before he reached his goal.

The interview he gave before leaving in February 1914 lies before me and very revealing it is; this exactness in him was instinctive. The idea of the story he would tell had been with him for some time, and it is interesting to see how far it had developed, in the words he uses here about the contrast between Jesus and Paul:

I feel I cannot describe a country I have never seen, if I don't know whether this place is on a hill or that in a plain, whether there is a river in sight or not. The smallest doubt of this kind stops the pen; it bothers you. You can't idealise when you don't know how far it is from the monastery to the Jordan. The monastery is in the wilderness. Is there a river there? If there is, I should like to see the river and spend a morning by its banks. There is sure to be a spring or well; if so, what sort of a spring? Can you see the Dead Sea or can't you? These are the questions I must get answered before I begin writing, and so I am going to the Holy Land.

What I should like to describe is the contrast between the two characters: between an ironical mystic — that is Jesus — and Paul, the man in the full tide of belief. This is what I am going to try to write — mind you, I don't say that I shall succeed — and I think I shall write it first as a story. That will enable me to become familiar with the subject, to get into it. The play will follow later.

That landscape — in which Joseph of Arimathea, (described most sympathetically), Jesus, the inspired,

mystical shepherd, and the Essene monks all had their being, and in which Paul was to walk and ruminate and meet Jesus after the crucifixion, in the many pages of *The Brook Kerith* — must be seen, so as to be re-created and told. It was not enough to explain why Jesus did not die on the cross but was saved from it in his swoon and hidden and healed by Joseph.

On the ship (one of those that went regularly to India) he found no one giving a thought except himself to the fact that they were passing along the fabled shores of Sicily. Joppa especially delighted him — its people, colours and guttural talk, and the strength of the men who came and bore him off in their arms to the row-boat for landing. 'The scattered rags that the Beduin carries on his shoulders and that stream about his feet . . . sublime are rags on a Beduin's back,' he noted. But not sublime or anything but horrible was the poverty that went by on all sides. Then he reached Jerusalem, with millions of oranges in its gardens and a multitude of small Syrian donkeys that must be able to tell, he thought, how vitally important they are to the country. The aspect of the town did not please him much, but soon the train took him into forbidding hills, barren hills with decaying rocks, and he wondered if he would find the landscape he wanted between the cliffs and the gorges. Find it he did, if one judges by the magnificent detail — far views, great stretches and precipitous drops, the whole scale of the country that he put into *Kerith* on his return.

It was then, on his return — I had seen very little of him in the past two or three years, having been abroad and grown up meanwhile — that I said to myself: 'Here is

G.M. and shall I feel that I must begin to know him all over again?’

Naturally we talked of Holt, which seemed already far away in time and had now passed into other hands. He, for one, would never see it again and took a melancholy pleasure in recalling some of its aspects, here a room and there a field and a walk; no one would ever love it again as well as we. And up came a curious memory:

‘Nancy, you were a funny child. Do you remember what you said to me in the churchyard at Holt? You bade me come to it with you and we sat on one of the beautiful old gravestones, you and I. Then you said to me: “I often come here alone. And I often wonder where we go after we are dead.” You were about five years old then. Don’t you remember, Nancy?’ But I did not remember.

Many were the questions at this time that he asked me about myself. Had I really been as discontented in Paris in that *pension de jeunes filles* as he thought I looked when he came over in the spring of 1913? Indeed yes; I was bored to death for the first three months. Having worked hard in Munich at music and German the autumn before, I had tasted of adult life, had been taken away from it and put in a place where I could go ahead at nothing, the lessons being almost infantile if one knew French. I felt out of tune with it all, despite the three charming sisters who ran the pension. Things changed with the literary classes of Professeur Bellessort; it was the Russians and Scandinavians, that term, and they were of great interest to me. Music saved me; I was going later to three concerts a week, the Opera as well, with Marie Ozanne, the sister I was able to detach from the rest, on those occasions. Wonderful was the further discovery of César Franck,

already played at Holt; most particularly of César Franck.

G.M. was delighted to talk of Turgenev and reminded me of his insistence years ago that I should read *Torrents of Spring* and *A Sportsman's Sketches*, two of the finest books ever written. And then returning to the subject before him, he questioned me about the possibility of my having been through a *crise de mysticisme*, for many, said he, at the age of sixteen or seventeen go through that, no matter what they become later. Had this happened to me?

No — certain old churches in Paris were a delight and I lingered long in them, but not more lengthily were my eyes lifted among the vaultings than they were used around me in the old streets near the Rue Mouffetard — the Place de la Contrescarpe, Rue de l'Épée de Bois, Rue du Pot de Fer, Place d'Italie — while talking German with Frau Schmutzler once a week; she was worn out by our enormous walks. My *mysticisme* was in those streets. He made me tell him about them at length as they were then, saying that they could not have changed much since his day — rough, poor streets full of the vernacular, down that deep drop of the hill at the back of the Panthéon and the Bal Bullier, the Closerie des Lilas just opposite — what of the Closerie? It had been my bourne at the end of a long, cold afternoon on foot in the snow from Passy. It still had its literary *cénacles* on fixed days, and dearly would I have liked to be taken there to meet some of the poets, but by whom?

I remember nothing very definite about G.M. during that London season of 1914, my first and last, I swore to myself, as one ball succeeded another until there were three or four a week and the faces of the revolving guards-

men seemed as silly as their vapid conversation among the hydrangeas at supper. He came to lunch sometimes at my mother's in Cavendish Square; I have no particular memories of it and was often away. He was there several times while Ezra Pound, at tea, would be stressing the need of helping James Joyce; no doubt he applauded my mother's eventual success in obtaining for Joyce a sum of money known as 'The King's Bounty'. In a letter of 1916 G.M. says he is sure that Joyce's talent is deserving of recognition. Yeats too came there in 1916, but I was in the country at the time a performance was given in the house of his play *The Hawk's Well*, and saw him only once: 'hard and mystical at the same time', I thought. G.M.'s quip about Yeats looking like a large, rolled-up umbrella left behind by some picnic party, made long ago in the Irish days, suggested a different side of the aloof, austere figure.

Of course (despite the contraction of memory again at this point) G.M. was often at Cavendish Square. He sat at lunch or dinner in the room hung with Russian ballet curtains of shot arsenic-green *lamé*, at his back the large screen in black lacquer painted and embossed with silvery porcupines in the haze of their own bristles, facing an even larger drop-cloth on which a forest of giraffes pushed their heads aloft into a tangle of dappled birch trees — both the work of the American, Robert Chandler. I know G.M. said a good many things about the war and the Germans, detesting, as he did, the pest of junker-militarism. In a letter he requested that Lord Curzon be asked, in 1916, if the war were to end without England having a single German cathedral in ruins to her credit.

THIRTEEN

By the end of 1915 G.M. returns into focus; it is always Ebury Street, we are alone and he talks to me a good deal about literature.

While walking away after an hour or two with him, something he had said generally stood out in my mind, and I noted that often his mood at the end would be different from that of the first moment. He warmed up under the influence of his own talk and I understand this better now than I did then. He had been at work all morning, his mind was still, say, with some alternate turn of a situation, and his eye might appear vague and empty, 'like the eye of every man while he is composing', he once said to me.

There was no brusquing G.M. over anything, and if he asked a question trouble must be taken with the reply, else he might turn a gaze of glass on to you, observing 'I cannot hear what you are say-ing', and one would feel abashed. And when, led on by some remark of his, I might impulsively beg him, 'Tell me all about it, do!' he would murmur that it wasn't so much of a thing after all, and I remember not one instance of having got what I asked in such a manner. The reminiscences would spring and flow, pouring into a great estuary of talk: it was of their own volition, never at prompting.

One day he remembered a little of Dieppe and of Conder, and this led to Aubrey Beardsley whose genius,

he thought, did have time fully to express itself before his early death — a great artist in almost all he had done; astonishing too in his *Under the Hill*, and better yet in the unexpurgated version of it: *Venus and Tannhäuser*.

There was talk about Dujardin, the French man of letters who was his life-long friend, with whom he often stayed near Fontainebleau (should I ever see him? I never did), and he might recite the neat, pretty poem he wrote Dujardin declining an invitation, being too busy at that time with *Héloïse and Abélard*, which begins thus:

*La chair est bonne de l' alose
Plus fine que celle du bar,
Mais la Seine est loin et je n' ose
Abandonner Pierre Abélard.*

Nice things were always said about his old friends, the painters Miss Sands and Miss Hudson, and another dart of fairly friendly mockery would be despatched at Jacques Emile Blanche. A diatribe against Henry James would come sooner or later; how he detested him, man and writer! The man, said he, was vain and pompous; his style was horrid. And he had been the cause of an awful row with G.M.'s dear friend, Mary Hunter (had she not given him the Bible, he reminded me, perhaps *The Brook Kerith* would never have been written). Mrs Hunter was, inexplicably, a great friend of the American writer as well; she had been very angry indeed with G.M.; no more visits to Hill Hall, once, for a long time! Not many were the allusions to his French days (and how one forgets things that are said). I remember his praise for Barbey d'Aurévilly's *Les Diaboliques*, and once, coming nearer this century, he grew enthusiastic over Debussy,

whose music seemed to him 'as perfect as antiquity — or Pater's prose.' There was much talk of Pater's prose, and of Landor's, two of the finest stylists of all time, but it was the poetry of William Morris that, for two or three years, dominated his mind. Seeing that I could not rise to his own high enthusiasm he would take down the volume ('a book in which there are no bad lines') and read aloud and comment — and here, in Hone's *Life*, is the letter he wrote me about William Morris:

1921

The poem I sent you is very beautiful, one of the most beautiful things in English poetry. I am sending you today the volume from which it was taken, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, by William Morris, the most perfect first volume of poems ever published by any man. . . . Morris is our only improvisatore, perhaps the only great improvisatore that ever lived. He could go to his study and write five hundred lines of *The Earthly Paradise* and return quite cheerful and happy, as if nothing extraordinary had happened; and these five hundred lines were never casual — every one was perfect. *The Defence of Guenevere* is one of the most beautiful poems in the language. *The Tomb of Arthur* I like better, perhaps, but every poem is good, especially *The Blue Closet*; that is a darling poem; read it, Nancy, and admire the perfect craftsmanship of everything in the volume.

It is G.M. I have to thank for one of the best and truest things ever said about art, better yet if one may extend it to writing and music. The exact words are gone but the sense of the phrase of Renoir's that he was quoting is: 'Seldom does inspiration visit her man. It is therefore the artist's business to be ever ready to welcome her, pencil in hand at all hours.'

How dismissive he was about Arthur Symonds. We had

been talking of Dowson's poems, which he put first, or near-first, among all the more recent minor poetry; there is a fine preface to the volume by Symons and, having met him recently, I wanted to talk about him. 'Oh *then*,' said G.M., 'Symons was a very good writer, he was indeed, earlier on. But now he seems ineffectual; his time is over — a ghost!' And I, who liked Arthur Symons very much, was somehow shocked, for he had been such a friend of G.M.'s, friend and counsellor in the days of his 'cock-loft' dwelling in the Temple, not long before he went to live in Ireland. But I soon remembered the dislike was mutual, for Symons had said some rasping things about G.M. to me not long before, in one of those sentences that were so difficult to catch, a sniff and a look like a stiletto shot at you together at the end of it. To be going to outlive G.M. by more than ten years . . . to be called a ghost already in 1920 or so!

But what was it G.M. told me that Whistler said about him?

Whistler had said that he was developing late. . . . If he lived long enough, he would possibly write a masterpiece. . . . No, it wasn't quite that. 'Moore is the youngest of us. He is developing very slowly artistically; by the time he is fifty. . . .' That is not right either. But this is:

'Moore has a good way to go. He started long after the rest of us. It will take him a long time to grow up entirely in literature. If he ever writes a really great book, that will be after he is fifty.'

G.M. was a very good talker indeed, and, at times, appeared to have prepared his theme; yet, as often, his spontaneity might startle even himself. And if long sequences

in some of his books ramble like streams, now in the sunny meadows of the past and now through wooded glades of a past further away yet, they seem to avoid *non sequitur*, no matter how far he strays. Conversation being suppler than the written word, a surprising number of things were talked of most of the times I went to see him, and a feeling of affection comes over me when I realise that my relative youth and inexperience did not prevent him from giving me the whole of his mind. He talked to me almost as if I were Balderston or any of the others that he has discussed Letters with to such profit in *Conversations in Ebury Street* and *Avowals*, in his Thesis at the beginning of *Pure Poetry* and in his Introduction to *The Pastoral Loves of Daphnis and Chloe*. If only I had noted some of these things at the time, the words in which they were expressed, if only. . . .

His remark about people who wrote their memoirs is arrestingly true; the same conclusion may have been reached by others, yet it was, and remains, the only time I have heard it made at all.

The memoirs in question were full of dinners and people 'having a good time'; more names followed on more house-parties, there was a lot of drinking interspersed with scandal and flashy epigrams; the reader was tossed from the high set to the fast set, and political revelations rained on him, 'now that secret history has become public gossip' — in G.M.'s own words. Well, said he, these two books we were discussing were plainly vulgar. The authors of them were not in themselves vulgar people. But the effect achieved was vulgarity, *because they were not writers*; they were entirely lacking in the craft of authorship.

Few contemporary novels pleased G.M. in the early twenties (or at any other time). I well remember his admiration for Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*, for the beautifully worked-out way in which, said he, the heroine becomes a witch — for the writing, for the whole idea of the story. Her next book too, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, delighted him: 'the missionary who makes an idol for a savage.'

He had great praise, very great praise, for *The Sailor's Return* by David Garnett, and here my memory is entangled, for I am sure this came out while he was talking of something to be avoided at all costs: 'the *dismal* ending'. Whatever happened, that must be avoided in a novel. An end can be tragic, or it can be happy; in some cases there need not be a clearly-defined ending, it may come on a note of suspense. But the end of a novel must never be *dismal*. His admiration, as ever when evoked, was very generous for *The Sailor's Return*; he approved also of the simple style in which it is written. But what word to use for the ending, I ask myself? I should have thought 'dismal' the exact definition, in that it is infinitely depressing — and none the worse for that, not by an iota. Maybe it struck G.M. as 'tragic'; for tragedy enough there is, and such an ending inevitable. As for the close of *A Mummer's Wife* — what is that if not both *dismal* and *tragic*?

He told me it took him eight to ten days to read a fairly long book, assimilating a chapter or two at a time, and — oh my Lord! — he had been trying to read one or two of Hardy's novels again — impossible!

The tempestuous explosions about Hardy, 'who cannot write, or tell a tale properly', about Conrad and about Henry James had been going on for years. The three had

come together at some time in his mind and now they always went together, and presently the outbursts crystallised into: 'Hardy the villager; Conrad the sailor; and Henry James — the eunuch!' — a pronouncement in its neat, epigrammatic shell that startled many, not all of whom by any means burst out laughing forthwith. Old friends of G.M.'s such as Steer and Tonks and Sickert who knew him very well indeed, had heard it and similar slashings many times before and would not be likely to turn a hair. But there were also admirers of one or of all three of these writers; they would protest and argue, and then G.M. following this bait of his would let himself go, piling example upon example and proof upon proof, and not always getting away with it. There was, however, always laughter as the little shell exploded, no matter how much faces had changed. That laughter was G.M.'s; he delighted in his utterance and was seraphic.

He would talk to me often about his difficulties with some chapter which continued to dissatisfy him and defied all his efforts. The thing was 'out of tone'; it might have to be 're-cast'. The most important matter of all in writing a book or a story, said he, is 'to get your scale right from the start', and sometimes that takes an inexplicably long time to do. 'Nothing helps a writer so much as to be able to talk about his work', he said to me again and again. There is an interesting complement to this somewhere in his Irish trilogy: the man who talks all the time about *how* he is going to write his book, well, the chances are he will never write it at all.

'Oh my dear Nancy . . .' he would sometimes groan over his morning's work and begin talking of 'lacklustre days', of the rain, the mud, the gloom of Ebury

Street (a horrid street at times, we would agree). And in summer . . . he was suddenly on his feet muttering, to go and see if that blind were askew again today, the dusty sun of Pimlico pouring on to a certain delicate painting of his. He would settle it properly and return to where he had left off: the distribution of the theme evenly in all the chapters; this was much in his mind and he wrote of it later to me in a letter — one of the major problems in story-writing.

Well, authors work in different ways, of course he was aware of *that*, and, 'I am going to show you how Arnold Bennett writes all his books', he exclaimed one day as he rose from the table with a look of extraordinary malice, gathering together various writing materials, sitting down again and enacting every gesture of the description:

'First he takes a sheet of paper. And then he takes a pen and he dips the pen in the ink and then he writes the title of the book on one sheet, and the numbers of the chapters on another sheet. Then he writes "Chapter I", at the top of a page and begins with the first line, and then he writes the rest of the book straight through, to the very end, until he has finished it. *I cannot write like that! Khk, Khk, Khk, Khk, Khk!*'

Authors *do* work in different ways — but in all this no place was allotted by G.M. to the corrections Bennett might find it necessary to include in such a masterly schedule. *No* corrections, maybe? Was it fun, was it envy, was it mockery — was it even true?

Edmund Gosse had some pertinent things to say about G.M.'s way of working and, about this time, he took me to tea with Gosse, who was very courteous, very charming and very precise. He had remonstrated with G.M. in

the *Sunday Times* on the score of his incurable revisings and rewritings. The occasion that evoked Gosse's beautifully worded article and G.M.'s witty reply was the publication separately of a whole chapter and some other matter to which was given the title *Fragments from Héloïse and Abélard*. Gosse remarked that he had been quite content with the little Astrolabe (son of Héloïse), 'just as he was'. Why had G.M. thought it necessary to make him 'better yet'?

Why so much revision? Gosse had found several reasons for, and as many against, G.M.'s practice. A salient one in favour was this:

'Profoundly and continuously occupied with the various problems of style . . . his natural reply is that he does not write to arrest our indolent attention with a tale, but to add to the literature of the country another durable ornament.'

And G.M. had returned compliment for compliment:

'Gosse, like Gautier, sits at his work spinning faultlessly like a spider, and no more than a spider does he think of revising his delicate woof.'

FOURTEEN

THERE would be days in Ebury Street when I found G.M. in an uncommunicative mood and questions were put to me instead: had any new magnates been discovered by my mother? Were they coming to heel properly in support of Beecham's opera seasons for which she did so indefatigably much? As a rule he kept for the end a little phrase I heard with embarrassment, having no desire to impart confidences:

'Tell me about your lovers!'

I think he must have said this to many women, young and old. It has rather a French ring to it: '*Parlez-moi de vos amants*' or '*Contez-moi vos amoureux*'. Which did he mean? There is a difference in French. I suppose he meant at that time 'Tell me about your young men'. He did not ask many questions as to how I was finding life at eighteen and nineteen years old. The London season of 1914, those first two years of the war, at the rhythm apparently traversed by me and those of my generation, were surely 'out of tone' in Ebury Street. It would be unseemly to bring here disjointed accounts of late hours at wild parties dancing to the first jazz bands, of drinking in the Café Royal Brasserie with tipsy poets and 'chaps' on leave, of poker-playing, war-work in canteens — even of the dread, more and more justified, that every young man one liked was going to be killed at the front. All of it would have had to be told in slow detail. No, no; unthinkable.

But there were other days when he was communicative, confidential even, and it was in a beautiful mood that he unfolded to me the first occasion on which he met my mother. For a start, he told me about the state of mind she took him out of:

‘You see, I was very much in love, and very unhappy. In love with a remarkable woman; oh, she was all of that. But she would not listen to me! Oh! she could be vexing. My Lord, she was an impossible woman, but she held me fast. And one time she vexed me so much that she made me lose my temper entirely. I was getting very tired of having my hopes dashed, you see. Well, I was so angry at her goadings and her self-contradictions that I lifted my foot and I kicked her while we were walking and arguing in the Park. I will say it was nearly dark and the Park almost deserted. I kicked her in the behind — in the bustle, if you prefer — and of course, after that. . . . Well, your mother cured me of my love for her. It was your mother, Nancy, who did that for me.’

He had met her at a banquet, in the Savoy Hotel.

‘She was with her mother, Mrs Tichenor. Oh! She was a *lovely* girl and I was immediately attracted to her. She wore a grey shot-silk gown; shall I ever forget it? She was looking at the cards on the table and it seems she did not like the neighbours she was to sit between, or else she wanted to talk to me. So she bent over the table and changed the cards, saying “I am going to sit next to Mr George Moore!” Her conversation was brilliant. She took a great interest in me, and I began to see a lot of her and of her mother — a dear woman.’

Years after he would say there were two women in his life: 'Maud — and H  lo  se'.

He wrote to her in much earlier times:

'For twelve years the wonder has never grown less. . . . I am the most fortunate of men; surely the most fortunate man in the world is he who meets a woman who enchants him as work of art enchants. I find in you Manet, Berthe Morisot, Tourgeneff, Balzac, Shelley, and the works I cannot write but would, were I the George Moore that George Moore sees in front of him, beguiling him, luring him like a will-o'-the-wisp. If I have failed to write what I dreamed I might write, one thing I have not failed in — you. You are at once the vase and the wine in the vase. You are the music and the instrument which produces the music, and you are a prodigious virtuoso.' He told Howard de Walden that she was Mozart's Symphony in G Major to him, and as 'joyous'. Howard, not knowing that symphony, may have thought him foolish; 'less foolish,' he maintains, 'than many another, for I am wise enough to delight in my folly and to take pride in it'.

He told her she had given him what other women had offered but which he did not want from them: an immense kindness and an extraordinary sympathy. Much later he evokes her 'brightly coloured cheeks and fair hair, fair as the hair in an eighteenth-century pastel'. And again, later yet, he remembers how she seemed to him in her beautiful dress at their first meeting: 'like a Gavarni drawing'. He had had to think what she reminded him of, and it was that. In her he found his ideal: 'Very few men have seen their ideal as close to them and as clearly as I have seen mine.'

A strong characteristic in G.M., and a very sympathetic

one, was his great respect for love. This was in the very fibre of his nature — never mind all his elegant levity typified by those unforgettable words about two people unexpectedly in bed together: 'And did their hands stray?' — never mind those extraordinary bouts of conventional prudery that would sometimes attack him, to the astonishment of all. As man and as artist, his respect for love, apart from 'passages' between people, was very true.

Surely this is most visible in his books. As a writer, he is bound up with a passion in my life during that war, no matter if the link be gratuitous, in that my love and I, sitting in a tree and under a tree, read aloud to each other several days running from his *Story-Teller's Holiday*, the beauty of the writing, the mood of the book and our own and everything else about those hours being unaccountably moving. They were hours put away for ever soon after, under the seal of death.

From talking to me about the Love Courts of the Middle Ages and the love-tenets of those times, he would pass on to wonder at the strange forms that love has ever taken, a man or a woman lying in one lover's arms, his thoughts or hers in those of another. Well, said he, one may be unfaithful and yet constant — a great truth many people were unwilling to recognise.

How his moods did vary. I arrived once to find him in an awful temper. That translation of one of his books into French — it simply wouldn't do. *My Lord*, how could anything be so bad, 'whole bunches of verbs all together'; the translator seemed unaware of the havoc he had made in the text; he would have to be told, the whole thing radically changed. And now, look at what he'd done! In

his haste to get a letter off, he had just torn the damned stamp in two — his gesture indicated a catastrophe, half the beastly thing was sticking to him yet. My laughter moved him to rail suddenly against a dreadful nuisance that was on the increase — those odious dogs that made the streets so filthy. *That*, if anything, warranted a strong letter to the newspaper; the hooting and honking of the taxis another!

How much on his nerves at times was Ebury Street; life got on one's nerves, indeed it did. And if at such moments (but not at such moments alone) an unwary caller arrived, there would a shuffling consultation behind the door with the parlourmaid, and the caller, made well aware of it in the passage, would be sent away; or, on second thoughts spoken aloud, admitted. Woe betide if he or she came with a request at that moment for G.M.'s company somewhere and dared to urge him. Up would fly those hands and out would come that well-scanned line in six iambic pentameter feet and eleven syllables:

'You/for-get/that I/have o-/ther things/ to do!'

Often he was so hasty that he sounded rude. And not everyone understood that nothing would be allowed to interrupt his work, especially when it had reached some point where the rhythm of it might be lost for ever, precisely at one of those large luncheon-parties. Tonks said, how rightly, that he had 'the divine selfishness of the artist'. G.M. himself has written: 'One loses one's temper sometimes and then is sorry.'

There was that fresh impulsiveness to him which I associate paramountly with the Irish, although Yeats and Joyce were as Irish and each seemed to me as unsupple and unspontaneous as an iron pipe; but then I saw Yeats only

once and Joyce three times; they could be nothing of the kind within themselves, else how could they have written as they wrote?

One of the things I would sometimes ask G.M. to tell me a little of was, of course, Ireland. In vain, in vain. 'What do you want to know about it? Oh, my dear Nancy, that is a subject I really cannot go into.' It is in *Salve* he says that the writing of each story in *The Untilled Field* taught him a great deal about his own country.

Moore Hall was burned by the Irish in 1923 and I asked him once about the circumstances of the destruction of his old home—all but the walls. But only a great sadness came into his face as he muttered something indistinct. There was no railing at those who burned it, and I suppose it was partly this which made me wonder if there were not a certain amount of sympathy in him towards Home Rule. Well, I have seen one letter of his, written in 1916 to Edward Marsh, in which his tone about Ireland is sardonic: he is against Home Rule and says that democracy cannot succeed with the Irish, for they like to persecute, as much as they like to be governed by Catholicism.

Be that as it may, the recognition in art of an Irishman, when genius or talent warranted, had all his support. In that same letter he is quite certain that Joyce deserves help from a literary point of view; he talked to me about this later on. It pleased him greatly as a compatriot as well as an author and dramatist that the Irish Players had their immense success at the Queen's Theatre in London—Sara Allgood and Arthur Sinclair, Maire O'Neill and Fred O'Donovan being superb actors and the rest of the troupe excellent. But their brogue! said he; could every Londoner understand it and the ways of Irish-English

speech? He had some doubts about that. What a role there was for Arthur Sinclair in *The Rising of the Moon* by Lady Gregory, one in which he gave the fullest of himself. It needed no critic to tell the English what a masterpiece of its kind was Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, that being as self-evident as immediately perceived — a masterpiece of a kind that did not exist before, of a kind very unlikely to be achieved again.

This was during the summer of 1918, when the end of the war was not yet in sight. G.M.'s attitude to the war, apart from his detestation of German militarism in general, had become hazy to me. I find it in Osbert Sitwell's *Great Morning*, that remarkable addition to the history of our epoch. In its lively pages are the words: 'G.M. took a great dislike to me, but in time it passed; it was based on the fact that I did not support with enthusiasm the idea of an indefinitely long war with Germany.'

FIFTEEN

THE first volume of *Wheels*, the Sitwells' anthology of poetry written by seven or eight of us, came out in November 1916, with five or six poems of mine in it, the first to appear in a volume. My contribution to what one of the hostile critics stigmatised as 'conceived in morbid eccentricity and executed in fierce fictitious gloom' seems not to have displeased G.M.

121 Ebury Street, December 2, 1916

I have looked into *Wheels* again and find that you have written much better poetry than I thought for. Nature has given you an exquisite ear for rhythm and I think if things go well with you, you may write some poetry that will do you honour and please your friends.

I am writing this letter because I feel that my first letter about *Wheels* was somewhat cold, supercilious perhaps, and to be supercilious about [here he quotes the first lines of several poems] would be to prove myself, not only supercilious but without that perception of good English which it would seem my friends have begun to expect from me.

I think I saw G.M. only once during the whole twenty months of my married life, which had now just begun — a caesura between many good things past and further good things to come. The end of this detestable stretch and the return to self coincided with two agreeable days at Mrs Hunter's. It was here I found G.M. again and a memento is with me yet: the snapshot I took of him standing urbanelly on the terrace of Hill Hall.



G. M. at Hill Hall

Soon after this I was sharing a house in beautiful country near Oxford with a great friend, a woman whose looks, personality, conversation, literary taste and sense of life (does one ever give such a person full due?) were sure to interest him. Our delight at his saying he would come for a week-end was tempered by wondering if he would find our way of living too rudimentary, the house not very comfortable. No, he would not be in the least put off. How unfortunate that late on the eve of his visit a man should announce he was unexpectedly on leave, arriving forthwith. It was his right, he said. That meant an angry man in the house, having a row with his wife — indeflectably — during every hour of his stay. G.M. in such circumstances was unthinkable. To this day certain words ring in my head on appropriate, that is to say, on anger-provoking occasions. Even here he seems to have found *les mots justes*. My telegram reached him, he wrote after a long silence, as he was getting into a taxi for the station and, despite all I had conveyed in my letter, 'No excuses and no explanations are necessary.'

We felt decapitated. Although blameless we had been driven to a sorry trick, and the lowering, ugly week-end that had passed as foreseen, mercifully without G.M., was no consolation. He soon forgave me: rows between others, he said, are unendurable; he would have left the house.

G.M. had met the St John Hutchinsons during or soon after the war; they were great friends already when, at the first mention between us of the name, he suddenly broke into an imitation of that portentous 'Yes, yes' of Hutchy's, that multi-edged mannerism on top of the super-Oxford voice. Oh that voice, how he does put it on when he

wants to! said he. A devastating man in court he must be, finding arguments to heckle his opponent to death with and crush the wretched accused, besides impressing the learned friend who sits in judgment. One wouldn't like to come up against Hutchinson, a scathing remark always lurking about in the offing — which may pass over the heads of some of the jury, but will influence the perceptive. Insinuation is a great legal weapon; I fancy our Hutchy is a master of it! Well, he is a man of very good taste and he has read a great deal. As for Mary, she is a *dear* woman, and a very clever one as well.

He often went to stay with them at Wittering, in the cottage they had transformed into a beautiful home full of fine books and works of art, on the side of a little road, overlooking the great estuary near Chichester. 'Very highbrow, that is what people say of them, is it not?' he asked me. No matter what silly word were applied to them, and 'highbrow' is not an attractive word, *he* took the greatest pleasure in their company. He did indeed, and it was more of these two that we talked than of any other people. There was no 'side' to them, said he; both were very knowledgeable about art, although he could not follow them all the way into modern art. However, more numerous were the things that united than those that kept them asunder.

I am sure Hutchy and I never told G.M. how much he meant to us. Hutchy being one of my greatest friends, the many letters we wrote each other often contained our admiration and it took the form of putting in a few sentences '*à la manière de*'. How lengthily we could have gone on 'Moore-ing' is another matter; we never rode our fancy to death. Hutchy gave me several of G.M.'s books;

it was then I read the three volumes of the Irish trilogy for the first time.

Suddenly at this point I think of my three locked diaries, all of 1919, the only diary ever kept by me until four years ago. Might there not be some mention of G.M.? They are tight-locked, the war has swallowed up the keys; I have never opened them since their own day. They were saved from the pillage by that miraculous Picarde, Georgette Goasgüen, under the dangerous eye of the village mayor, who told her 'everything now belongs to the Germans' and who is, doubtless, the real cause of the loss of all G.M.'s letters and how much else. Brave Georgette, kind fate that enabled her to preserve these books! She has saved some little touches about him. For now I have been with them to the local blacksmith two of the books are open; they opened at a touch of his hands, without keys, although they would not do that for me.

And here, amid a welter of youthful lamentations about life, amid a recorded frenzy of people, are some brief entries, and one little anecdote, and one acid afternoon.

June 9, 1919, after my first long stay in France: 'Saw G.M. He was wearying today, grown rather deaf, slow and exacting, but says I have become more "defined" in character and am "coming into my own"; also likes certain poems. He was very amusing about the story of Héloïse and Abélard — a grand subject for him.'

June 15, at Wittering: 'Hutchy and I went for a walk; we found ourselves "doing" G.M., a trick which, once begun, it is impossible to stop.'

June 16: 'When G.M. stayed at Wittering, he insisted on rowing the ferry-boat and asked the man if he knew Charon, but was most inept himself, in his black bowler and tight,

untidy grey frock-coat: "He used to ferry the spirits over", he informed the ferryman who answered that he had never ferried spirits, but often gentlemen *with spirits in them.*'

July 14 at Turks Croft (my summer cottage near Crawley in Sussex): 'Hutchy was delightful; we wandered about and walked and read an amazing new poem by Eliot [*Gerontion*, I remember], very intense and good. As the afternoon was long, he read aloud from G.M.'s *Memoirs of my Dead Life* — that extraordinary story, *In the Luxembourg Gardens*, where we found much that is typical of him.'

July 18, Turks Croft: 'Wild with the heat were we, Ted Ralli and I, but still talking a lot. We lay on the lawn all day, I reading aloud G.M.'s *Lovers of Orelay* — divinely amusing.'

July 19, Turks Croft: 'Took Hutchy for a long wet walk and found ourselves at the Ifield Village Peace Celebrations; talked a great deal of G.M.'

July 20, Turks Croft: 'During a five-mile talk with Hutchy, discoursed most of the time about G.M. and thought suddenly (which I told him) 'If I were his daughter, it seems to me I should become quite a different personality and a much more contented one.'

August 20, Turks Croft: 'Rather pleased at being alone for the day; read to the end of G.M.'s *Vale*; it is wonderful.'

August 20, Turks Croft (Hutchinson was staying here a few days and the friend I shared the house with, Marjorie Trefusis, was about to marry John Craigie, the son of a one-time flame of G.M.'s, Pearl Craigie, who wrote as John Oliver Hobbes): 'Having walked by that famous "short-cut" to Crawley and staggered back laden with Spanish wine, Hutchy and I were somewhat tired. The early afternoon passed limply on the lawn in sleep, and then the mothers began to arrive; first Marjorie with hers, aged seventy; we thought her severe and heavy — I am appalled by my incapacity in disguising boredom. After ten minutes, mine and G.M. were at the gate — only Alexander and Collins were lacking for the completion of contrasts and extremes. G.M. was tightly buttoned into a grey suit; very fat today, very slow, with buttoned boots of brown, the tabs showing at the top, with a tasselled umbrella that he waved about; he would not sit down and was restless. The

mothers were sour to each other, tea a strain; Her Ladyship apparently in a furious temper, which I did not notice at first although the others did. After a few cross-grained words all round, Marjorie took her mother away and the four of us were left, Hutchy, self and these two who had motored from London. I took G.M. for a stroll in the garden; he was suave but ponderous, still harping on why I should wish to publish poems now — in his eye a roguish gleam when he spoke of his journey to France, detailing several adventures with women. Meanwhile, mother was working herself up still more. First, over the tea, which she said was so bad that she “wouldn’t offer it to a horse-thief”, for it was “muck”. Secondly, over my supposed friends — “Americans”! All this was said to Hutchy, who was terrified and replied “Yes, yes, quite, quite” to everything. Then came a flare-up about S’s mother having taken my linen and china from Montagu Square [the house of married, pre-separation days] which ended in an outburst to me: “You have *no* sense, knowledge or experience, and *no* plan of life.” She enlarged vastly on the subject to Hutchy; she was beside herself, but finally worked off all this spleen on us. G.M. also in a state. I took him into the house, where he made a rush for the bathroom, piping “May I seclude myself for a minute?” and then was much calmer. But they were both incensed at the time it had taken them to get here from London and seemed to blame me for that, leaving *at last* in a better temper, having put me into a hot rage and given Hutchy an acute headache. After they had gone, we stamped round fields at a great pace, disclaiming against them, laughing but irritated, wondering whether G.M. was at that moment on his old hobby-horse, asking Her Ladyship if I were possibly in love with Hutchy. Most certainly he was, I heard later; he *had* been talking of this. Hutchy recalled an old expression of mine describing Her Ladyship as “a polished termagant” — very apt for today. She looked wild and wicked and very determined, having obviously been antagonised by something before arrival.

September 7, London: ‘All of a long morning in bed, picking out “old papers”, essays written between the ages of nine and fifteen, funny, some of them — letters of Munich 1912, of Paris 1913, *billets-doux*, old jokes and clichés,

allusions and bric-à-brac, amongst them a letter from Rudolf Besier, the playwright, saying "I think you are going to be a very wonderful woman" (1910, that); how cheering! In all, it was almost a country-house day; mother upstairs, Lynette (darling dachshund) on the bed. Sent for G.M. [*Sent for G.M., if you please!*] He came at once, in a superlative mood, wanting to go to Richmond to Lady Donegal's, but that was stopped. He stayed till seven and talked and talked — of love, of erotic adventures, of *his* adventures, citing a very recent one of a woman who came to see him about a play, lay on a sofa and said "Shall I, shall I?" Apparently they did! I could hardly believe this. G.M. was gross at moments, but most lovable; *never* have I liked him so well. He was very human and sympathetic; he also talked of my ex-husband, saying how awful he had always thought him and how well he understood my point of view. He talked a lot about his *Mummer's Wife*, which I am reading. Indeed, I have never got on with him so well — which leads to the conclusion that he *does* take a great deal of time.'

October 10, London: 'To the Eiffel Tower where Mr Stulik seemed upset in his mind and gave me a glass of Augustus John's brandy; thus comforted, to a tea-party at 44 Grosvenor Square, where G.M. was fuming and stamping, and also furious with me for taking Ted to see him after lunch.'

October, Hindhead: 'Reading G.M.'s *Mummer's Wife* — disheartening masterpiece — on the subject of which I wrote him a new kind of letter, which he was pleased to call my "*first woman's letter*".'

His interest in my first book of poems, *Outlaws*, was manifest in a very lengthy review in the *Observer* of 27 February 1921, where he mingled great praise and hard criticism. It is a fine piece of writing and it must have surprised many that the famous author should take so much trouble with a new poet:

A book that is not like other books — he wrote — a spiritual outlaw, with 'more genius in it than there is in

the great mass of her contemporaries, and much less talent. By genius we mean a special way of feeling and seeing that separates a man or a woman from the crowd, and by talent we mean handicraft, tact, judgment. Genius cannot be acquired; we have it or we have it not; but talent can be.' He hoped I would apply myself to the acquisition of it, 'a much rarer thing than is commonly supposed. . . . Genius wastes if not supported by talent. A frail thing is genius, even as the soul, and will not survive the age of thirty if ample provision of talent be not made for it.' He wrote of the 'spring and exaltation' of some of the lines, deploring the syntax in others. Where had this 'impulsive music' been heard before? It was the personal passion of Héloïse, St Teresa and Emily Brontë — but certain things should be re-cast; 'ultimate genius is not in explosions but in restraints. It is not enough to believe that earth is as beautiful as heaven — it is necessary to write over the study door; "The correction of form is virtue". Shelley, the most inspired of our poets, could re-cast, and whosoever doubts this let him read the first draft of the *Epipsychidion*.' And then, having already quoted twelve lines of one of my sonnets, he quotes the full twenty-one lines of a nature-poem, *The River Nene*.

His review, I was told, for I was already living in France, made a stir; he was pleased with it, pleased at Mary Hunter telling him he had skilfully mingled praise with admonition, and at the letter I wrote him in reply to his, 'a most enthusiastic letter. I never knew Nancy so moved before, and I should like to hear how she liked the article, which of course was better than the letter of a man who is by no means a letter-writer.'

No matter what he says about his letter-writing, every

one of those left me, or nearly every one, contains some excellent, original observation about the craft of writing:

121 Ebury Street, August 13, 1921

Dearest Nancy,

Many years ago a poet said to me, and his words have often been with me: If you go out and amuse yourself when you can't write, your art life will waste into nothingness. An artist's life is in this like an acrobat's, he must exercise his craft daily, when inspiration is by him and when it is afar. He must not wait for inspiration, he must continue to call it down to him always and at last it will answer him; I should have said, be always with him.

You have received the second story. I think it contains the core of a poem but if you do not continue to write vainly the subject will never become familiar. It is only by vain writing that the subject becomes us. I have tried to get out my first chapter of the story I related to you many times — ten or a dozen times, and it is only beginning to yield to my iterated attacks. The difficulty of story writing is the even distribution of the theme throughout the chapters. My difficulty is always with the first two or three chapters, most people's with the last, and the explanation of this is that I always write with the end in view, almost gluttonously like a child at the cake during dinner. And the moral of all this is that you must take the muse by force. In love we woo at intervals, but in art we are always wooers. The way may seem too hard and rough and you may answer me: you would take savour of life out of my mouth and I answer: mayhap.

Another letter to me, found in Hone's *Life*:

13th October, 1921

Playfair tried to keep me away from rehearsal till I began to suspect him, so one day I turned into the theatre at eleven o'clock, seated myself in the stalls, and awaited events. Playfair said I was a naughty child to come before I was sent for, but that all the same he was glad to see me, to which I

answered that we didn't seem to be altogether agreed on the cast. The rehearsal began, and it was much like the rehearsal described in a volume entitled *Ave*.

This play was originally *Elizabeth Cooper*, re-written as *The Coming of Gabrielle*, and it had to be given up as they were unable to agree. It was performed, however, in 1923, with Athene Seyler, about whom G.M. could be said to be 'raving'; she was his idea of perfection in the role of Gabrielle — and it is an airy, witty play to read.

SIXTEEN

HIS love of French landscape was vouchsafed me when he came to Normandy, to the village of St Martin-Eglise, four miles inland from Dieppe, where in the summer of 1921 I lived in the Chalet Augustine, described by some as 'a cuckoo-clock on the railway' — a railway with hardly a train on it to vex the vernal silence. Nearby, the Auberge du Clos Normand was famous for its trout in the orchard stream; they were quickly transferable to the table and presently eaten by that stream under the apple trees, on one or two occasions by G.M. and me.

Here, at the Clos Normand, he spent five or six days. A great drought was going on, yet some of the meadows remained lush, the many willows and poplars delighted him, the abundance of meadow-sweet and purple loosestrife. He blossomed in France; why live so much in Ebury Street when all this enchantment was but half a day away? He should, he said, come here much more often. Endearing was his country mood; his roving eye lit upon nature for its own delight, never failing to lay in provender the while for those long smooth sequences, those tapestries stitched and counter-stitched with well-observed detail — the way the rooks flew one evening, the peculiar run of the stoat. Have I not seen him ecstatic at the sight of a waving field of mustard: 'Was there ever such a yel-low?'

A serpent, however, crept into the paradise, when his

own sudden conventionality gave him a bad two days. He had come over at the week-end and a young man who had just arrived was in the cuckoo-clock. A young man, alone with me, for two days! A very cultured young man, of course, he was bound to admit, who could not be more deferential and so on, but a-lone! People would talk. . . . Several hours of sulking went by before the point was reached. It was the young man, I said, of a friend who had wired at the last moment that she could not come; I did not want to put him off; in any case it was too late. But the sulking continued and presently vexed me very much. Thus passed the week-end: G.M. at the Clos Normand, formality towards the young man instead of agreeable conversation *à trois*, a ridiculous malaise over nothing at all. Well, *that* was had out between us on Monday morning.

It was the Forest of Arques that soothed away his annoyance and, as soon as the last outburst of prudish conventionality was over (it didn't matter, it seems, whose young man this was), G.M. was enfolded within an amber mellowness as our long, slow walk proceeded through the great wood all afternoon and well into dusk, the traditional fanfare of hunting-horns playing afar, to consecrate, as it were, all these hours spent under the green vault.

It was then, talking of poetry, the idea came to him that I should 'try my hand' at a long narrative, 'the most difficult thing to do in all poetry'. He had read several sonnets of mine written in the fields that summer that were to come out in *Sublunary*, and the title-poem, the theme of which was that an answer to all things might be granted if the questioners had sufficient faith. Poems like this, I knew

later, are uncontrolled; how do such ideas come to one? Somehow it took his fancy. No! It wouldn't do, but if re-written . . . well, the promise was there, and a very good ear. Or, better still, why not try something more objective?

His taste in poetry was far from mine as a rule and, if we generally agreed over what seemed bad, pretentious or dishonest, we were often not in accord over what was good. I thought he set form and the academic proprieties so high that often they were preferred out of all proportion to the content, character or personality of the poem itself. It is an old battle, one which should not arise, every beautiful poem being as beautifully written in its own form and metre as the inspiration deserves. All this, in retrospect, would take pages, and it was never possible to explain to him why the theme he sent me soon after would not do either. It seemed to me a subject for him — in prose — an offshoot of *Héloïse and Abélard*, which had come out that February. He could certainly have evolved 'a pretty piece' out of his little synopsis:

LADY GERALDINE (or any other name that strikes your fancy), living in a castle, is brought by the romance of the forest to dream of adventures that might befall her. Sometimes she thinks of a prince, who would carry her away on his horse to a ship, and sometimes her lover is a highwayman, with whom she lives in secret in a cavern. Her dream takes many various forms, and every evening at sunset, or at moonlight, she imagines that her dream will become flesh. But none does she meet like either a highwayman or a prince, only woodcutters and lepers. She peers into caverns in search of a magician, but finds none and even the moonlight nights are empty of fairies and elves. But still she continues her search, and one night she meets in a corner of the forest where she has never been before a man who sits with

his face in his hands, seemingly overcome by grief; so immersed is he in grief that he does not see her and passes on. And wondering if she will ever see him again, she returns next evening; he is again walking in the forest, his head bowed upon his breast, and this time he passes so near her that she hears him sigh and sees him dash tears from his eyes and sit down upon the ground and lie so stricken that she dares not speak to him, but returns home wondering what might be the cause of his grief — some great love-sickness, perhaps. The thought inspires her to return again, but no sorrowing man is in the forest that evening, and she is about to rise from her seat on a fallen tree trunk and return home, when the man appears and sits beside her without even seeing that she is there. Very soon he begins to bemoan his lot and without noticing her. But taking courage, she says: 'What is it, sir, that you grieve for?' He rises up but she begs of him to stay a little while with her, for she, too, grieves. He asks her what her grief is and she answers: 'Nothing happens to me', to which he replies: 'My hap is the worst that can befall a man.' 'Only a great love can have inspired such grief as yours, sir', she says, and he admits that this is so, but tells her very little the first night. Again they meet and he confides more of his grief to her, for she is very winning and leads him to talk of himself. And every evening he tells her some further story of the wife he loved and who died, leaving him to bemoan her loss until death should put an end to his grief. He says that he wonders why he hasn't put an end to himself, and at once she begs him to tell her another story of his wife. And he continues evening after evening to relate his wife's beauty and goodness to her, till at last he confesses that he has no more to relate. 'Then shall I never see you again?' she asks. 'You have cured me of my grief', he answers, 'you have given me back to life.' And she asks whether she will be left alone now to seek for the prince or the highwayman or the magician that are not forthcoming, to which he says: 'We all go out into this world to seek something, and we all find something, but nobody finds what he seeks.' 'But sometimes', she answers, 'a woman is satisfied with what she has found.' And they walk away together into the darkness of the dell, lovers, the moon heard them vow, for this life and the next.

Visions of the Pre-Raphaelites! Rossetti, Burne-Jones or Ford Madox Brown for dress, William Morris for cadences — or was it more suggestive of Debussy and Maeterlinck? G.M. would have turned it into a mediaeval digression (the thought of *Héloïse and Abélard* pursued me), the 'woodcutters and lepers' inviting some peasant characterisation. But none of this, with all due deference, was for me.

He came to stay for two days that winter at Sanary in the Var, near Toulon, in a small pink villa called Le Mas Bressol, where this little snapshot was taken in a blaze of sun and a raging *mistral*. How benign he looks.

Away from the towns then, nearly all the coast still remained beautiful, with expanses of rural privacy, and it pleased him as we strolled, the wind having gone down, through some biblical olive trees along a rocky sea-path. There was some speculative conversation that night about James Joyce's *Ulysses* that Sylvia Beach was soon bringing out in Paris. As a compatriot and, I suppose, as a fellow-writer, G.M. felt an interest in Joyce and spoke of his admiration for one of the stories in *Dubliners*, one alone, the last in the book. It would be inventing were I to venture on what he said concerning the many styles in the great work when it was published, although I remember his comment on *Anna Livia Plurabelle* and other sections that came out before the whole of *Finnigans Wake*: 'Joyce has invented a language that only Joyce can understand.'

Our talk for a long time was about the making of poetry and there was a good deal of accompanying argument:

'Why call the thing "free verse" when it is prose?'

'How,' said two of us, the other being the American



G. M. and Nancy Cunard
at Sanary, winter 1921-22

painter, Curtis Moffat, 'how can you call it prose since it has poetic rhythm? It *must* have its own rhythm if properly written; as definite a rhythm as that in scanned, metrical poetry. It *has* got metre, if you can hear the feet. The rhythm should never be faulty, that is to say, broken by clumsy changes, unwarrantable changes of metre which make the lines fall jaggedly on the ear.'

As well stone the wind as talk to him of free verse, for he would be sure to counter:

'If it is not verse, or blank verse, with a regular metre, then it is prose. *Bad* prose if you like — but still prose.'

The discussion went on for hours. He would grant the existence of prose poems. Now, the French. . . .No, no, we said, that is entirely different.

It was a relief to get on to the subject of — fish. This coast, what did it produce? *Les rougets de la Méditerranée* and *oursins* — sea-urchins, a common delicacy here, drawn up from the bottom of Sanary harbour at a depth of about nine feet in a cleft bamboo. The fisher must have a good eye; he aims through the limpid water, driving the bamboo-pole firmly round the spikes of the little sea-beast, drawing it up thus. Of course he wanted to see this done but he was on his way somewhere and gone all too soon. Never, said he as I put him into the train at Toulon, never would he forget the great rose-coloured suffusion the sunset was laying all along the stretch of mountains at the back of the town. I think his love of France might well have led him to sell everything in London and spend the last years of his life in this country. An unpublished letter of his, years later, contains such a suggestion.

His letters are so full of perceptive remarks about

writing that it seems wrong to suppress them merely because they contain so much about my poems:

121 *Ebury Street, January 21, 1922*

I am writing to you with delight, for I know that your Poems mean a great deal to you, and I don't mean to stint my praise of them; for there is a conviction in my heart of improvement. [In the poem called *Sublunary*.] You have succeeded in conveying an atmosphere of midnight mystery and the awed desire of the disciples to obtain some knowledge of things occult from the wizard. This poem is, whether by design or accident, an endeavour to create something outside yourself. You know my beliefs — that art cannot be altogether subjective, that even the most subjective poems, the most personal to the poet, must be re-created to some extent, and the example I like to give of this necessary objectification is *Lines written in Dejection near Naples*, Shelley. I think you showed me the poem I admire at Martin Eglise, but in a less perfect state than it is at present. To make the poem a striking success you should still go over it. I accept, and with delight, the deliberate obscurities of Morris, *The Blue Closet*, for example, but your obscurities are not deliberate — they rise from pale or weak thinking, uncertain vision.

Certain other lines, he continued, should be 're-forged'. He even 're-cast' a dozen in another of my poems in this book, paraphrasing them up to the point of finding new meaning, one entirely his own, for the rest of *Horns in the Valley*.

It seems to me, Nancy, that we have now had enough of the Opera, and that the next verses should tell your belief that the evocative horns are not real horns inasmuch as the love-adventure of Tristan and Isolde is not in a single brief moment in time, but an immortal moment carried on through eternity which in certain moods is audible to us.

Many poems I now wrote, several of which were

printed in the *Saturday Review*, came to me in free verse and I remember thinking how much I should like to discuss with G.M. the point that all metres (or nearly all) can be fine, including irregular metre. But his mind was set, his ear incapable of hearing any rhythm whatever in free verse; as such, it was non-existent — 'bad prose'! Some years later he came to realise at least that the writing of poetry in irregular verse was not a mere following of 'fashion'. Doubtless this letter of his refers to such poems of mine:

121 *Ebury Street, July 1922*

I got your delightful letter last night and sat like one enchanted so intense was the evocation. I have just read the *Saturday* and would like you to remember that the advantages of rhyme and metre are that they supply the necessary resistance without which it is next door to impossible to write. A hard substance is needed and if metre and rhyme are dispensed with the thought does not take shape, as well might you try to mould a statue out of a fluid. Moreover whosoever follows the fashion loses all individuality — it is necessary to be stiff-necked and obdurate and to treat one's contemporaries with contumely. In the great periods the artist took strength from his environment; he was concentric, but in periods of decadence like the present, the artist must be eccentric, stand aloof and disdainfully.

SEVENTEEN

Now and again, while I was on a visit to London, G.M. and I would walk across Hyde Park from Mayfair when I accompanied him back to Ebury Street, hearing on the way how much these luncheon-parties he occasionally let himself in for at my mother's and elsewhere (he enjoyed them, of course) disrupted the entire day. Dressing for them — the morning dictation was already overshadowed by that; by now, of course, it was nearly tea-time. Well, I should come in, must come in and have a cup of tea; this day was done for and work out of the question.

I remember once trying to memorise all his pictures, but there were many and it seems to me that he altered the hanging of them once. The Manets were certainly upstairs; the David on the staircase or at the foot of it; the Monet in *the* room. Soon, one realised, Manet's portrait of his mother would appear as much of a 'classic' as the David and that would be because of its superlative quality. A masterly, 'static' picture; the word seems permissible, for not all paintings, by any means, are that; the *Etude pour Le Linge* changes three or four times a day here, on account of the light. The greys, deeper greys and suggestions of white and black in the portrait seemed never to alter, and in any case the *Etude* is done in a much more *enlevé* style; it is an impression of the subject.

He often asked me which of his pictures I liked best. In the end it came to be the Monet willows, and murmuring

that it should be mine one day, for he would leave all his paintings to my mother, he wondered what I thought of the portraits of him. For excellence in likeness, the S. C. Harrison of course. What could have gone wrong with the Orpen? A G.M. sitting despondent (how mis-representative) with his head in his hand, in a mood and wearing an expression such as one had never seen. It is an early work, and very different to Orpen's splendid *Hommage à Manet*, with G.M. in the foreground of a group of men at the breakfast table, the attitude and gesture caught to perfection as he sits with a paper in his hand, looking up at the Manet which hangs on the wall.

And the Aubusson carpet, he would ask, had I not kinder feelings about it now? Yes, time had toned it down, time and the London coal and climate; it was now suave and beautiful as it lay to perfection across the entire room.

The venue of all my visions of him in London is Ebury Street and Ebury Street alone, but of course he often lunched and dined at my mother's or we met in the houses of one or two mutual friends and went to dinner a few times in restaurants. But in which restaurants? Once at least, it seems, in the Eiffel Tower, made famous in 1914 by Augustus John, Wyndham Lewis, Mark Gertler, Iris Tree, Alvaro Guevara. Not only eating there more than anywhere else, I stayed there often when I came from France; the comfort was nil, the room cheap, the convenience considerable; food, drink, and hours, perfect. At first a small, cheap Soho place, then bohemian, then fashionable, the restaurant was certainly cosmopolitan and as near *avant garde* as anything in London could be. I must have dragged G.M. there one night, because this is

what a London paper wrote about good Rudolf Stulik's Tower:

At the Pall Mall Restaurant they are supposed to have a visitors' book which is insured for a thousand pounds. It would be interesting to know the worth of the book Stulik has. It contains such names as those of Sir Edward Lutyens, Kemam, the Japanese poet, a drawing by Edmund Dulac of W. B. Yeats, the signatures of Ellen Terry and Gordon Craig, Walter Rummel, Franz Lehar, and an announcement by George Moore that he dined there one night with Nancy Cunard and Aldous Huxley.

An announcement! How unlikely. Tipsy and exuberant we cannot have become, G.M.'s abstemiousness being not only considerable (although he enjoyed good wine) but up to a point communicable; none of the three of us can have written any such thing. Or did he put down a few words after all? Ungrateful memory! I search in vain; it is as if the dinner had never been. If it took place, then it occurred in 1922, the year I first met Huxley whom I have never seen since 1923 in Italy. The Eiffel Tower is gone; the restaurant, remains; prices are up, it is conventional, chic perhaps — its spirit is long departed and Stulik is long dead. Where is the visitors' book now?

I was soon returning to France, I know, and received 'a pretty piece' from G.M. dated 11 January 1923. 'I have just written this rondel inspired by your letter':

FOR NANCY WHO IS ABOUT TO LEAVE US

*Summer has passed away
And loveliness is dead;
And all the books are read,
What shall I do today?*

*The autumn dight in grey
Brings winter to her bed.*

*Summer has passed away
And loveliness is dead.*

*Only the robin's lay
Is heard around the stead
And from its eaves are fled
The birds that came in May.
Summer has passed away.*

G.M.

He had sometimes said that he longed to see 'the hill towns of Italy' and I cannot think how it happened that he never went to Italy in the whole of his life. Cortona and Arezzo, Borgo San Sepolcro too, though that is in the plain — the birth-place and apotheosis of Piero de la Francesca, for such are Cortona and Arezzo with his magnificent frescoes, while Borgo San Sepolcro contains a *Resurrection* as noble as *The Brook Kerith* — would assuredly have enchanted him. There is a legend about G.M. that he was quite capable of getting lost during a change of buses, but in fact he generally arrived at his destination, which is all that matters. I thought of him in Italy that spring; it was rough, cold travel, and I could not visualise the way he would have tackled things. I do not think he would have become 'wearisome' as a companion, as he puts it in this letter, and yet I cannot see us there together — perhaps in a motor-car, only in a motor-car, myself the interpreter? Meanwhile he was busy in London.

121 Ebury Street, February 25, 1923

I hope the letter I sent you to 5 Carlton House Terrace was forwarded to you. I do not remember that any important question was asked or any important event narrated, still you might like to have gotten it, and the rather as you tell me that you keep my letters, a fact which will not tempt me to cease scribbling to you the thoughts that come up in my

mind as I write and making slight alterations as my pen pursues its way. No more do I think of posterity in my letters than in my books. . . .

You are journeying with gusto, I perceive, making new acquaintances and picking up last year's. How delightful! Your letter stirs my longing, always incipient, sometimes very active, for speech with you and sight of you. But you would not be content to journey with me — I should become wearisome at the end of the week, despite the hill villages, their pictures and spires. Yet it would be cutting oneself off from an experience not to attempt an Italian journey, however disastrous it might prove. The Christian says *memento mori*, the pagan answers remember life, which seems to me to express a finer spirituality, for do we not create ourselves, our bodies in some measure, our souls completely?

I found myself not long ago at a party, an enchanting party, a music party and not having heard a note for many months the music fell like dew on a thirsting flower. I'd like to tell you about the songs that pleased me, and my appreciations, but you would like to hear what I am doing. At the present I am writing to you, but tomorrow I shall be reading *The Apostle* to Leslie Faber, one of our best actors, and when the reading is done I shall fall dissatisfied into a chair when the door closes behind the actor, dream and drowse there on how much better the play would be if — naturally I cannot finish the sentence today; tomorrow I shall know how to finish it, but I have finished so many sentences that I shall refrain from sending you the puerile whimsy that will torment me in the red velvet chair. Today I am convinced I have written another masterpiece. Paul strikes high like a great dogmatic tower and the subordinate characters seem to be possessed by many various souls. If I am not mistaken in my making of *The Apostle* somebody will act it, for it appeals to the vanity of the mummer as few plays do.

I have no more to tell you but do you write telling me when you return to Paris.

Always affectionately yours,

GEORGE MOORE

EIGHTEEN

WHEN he came to Paris, sometimes on his way to Dujardin at Le Val Changis near Fontainebleau, he would stay at first at the Hotel Continental, where he had been one of its earliest clients, several decades before. It became too noisy; the St James et d'Albany was a later hotel, then the Brighton in the Rue de Rivoli, where he was plagued by the worst noise of all; even such as it was then, it maddened him. On one of his last visits, in 1926 or 1927, I got him a room at Foyot's with a sitting-room of his own favourite period. What an agreeable hotel it was, above that survival of the Second Empire, the famous restaurant with its red plush seats, shining brasses and good manners, where sundry old gentlemen sitting late and long over their wine and talk were often Senators from the Sénat a few yards away.

Everyone who walked in the street with G.M. must remember that umbrella of his pointed admonishingly, his eye following it, at the onrushing traffic in London. In London, yes, it seemed to pay some attention to his implicit injunctions as he crossed big streets, sometimes in a series of short runs. But in Paris! It was agonising to traverse wide thoroughfares with him. How often did I long to see him soar into the air — all sails out — across that very Rue de Rivoli where I would be fetching him for lunch.

When I was installed at 2 Rue le Regrattier at the

corner of the Quai d'Orléans on the Île St Louis, G.M. would appear there each time he came to Paris, at dinner, at lunch, at any time of the day. In an eighteenth-century building my small ground-floor faced south, overlooking the Seine deep below the high-walled embankment. We would walk back there often in the mid-afternoon from the Boulevard St Germain, admiring the great stern of Notre Dame as you see it when you reach the old site of the Morgue on the tip of the Île de la Cité, as you see it even better having crossed the bridge on to the Île St Louis. Or is it a prow advancing? We could never decide. In any case, it was far more pleasing than the hard majestic façade of the Cathedral on the Place du Parvis that had been gazed at by so many generations of tourists one could fancy it somewhat de-personalised by the eyes of the herds. He would delight in the gargoyles and flying buttresses on the southern side. What a place Paris must have been in the time of Villon, said he — the narrow, crooked streets, some of which remained unchanged along the Left bank, Rue Gît-le-Coeur, Rue du Chat-qui-pêche and even smaller ones—fearful winters of deep snow, people lying dead in it of cold and hunger, marauding bands, wolves that sometimes came in. Did I not like Villon? Almost more than any other poet, I told him, along with Baudelaire, and the contrast made him smile.

Many a talk he had in the Rue le Regrattier with Anna Calloch, my Breton maid. She was enthusiastic about him, he must be *un grand homme et un grand esprit*. How much of it he had, *de l'esprit*. He made her laugh at all his questions about her life. He must have taken a lot of trouble with his wonderful French; other foreigners. . . . But how *could* he know about those two fishes? He had been talk-

ing to her at great length about *le bar et l'aloise*, fishes you don't often find on the market. In the end, she said she wished he would come and live in Paris, that we might see him every day.

Many a time would he come there to dinner and very nice he looked in the narrow, low-ceilinged room, the candle-light all about his whiteness. The room then seemed to take on something of the aspect of a shrine around this one companion at the old oak table, a scarlet lacquer cabinet between two doors, green panelled eighteenth-century walls on each side of the let-in bookcase with a handsome row of his works. A shrine it never looked at other times, not even the night two other venerable men of letters dined with me, neither of them so very old yet both wearing their white crown of fame: Havelock Ellis, and Arthur Symons who brought him to me. Symons came there often, but it was only that once I talked to the lovable, gentle-voiced, great scientist.

Very much at our ease were G.M. and I after an excellent dinner. Anna had got him a fish (it might not be *the* fish, *un bar*, but it was impeccably cooked) and as we sat in the small salon of beautiful proportions, its walls painted a smoky red above the black wainscoting, two tall windows open to the warm night let in the feathery seeds of the poplars along the Seine below. That would be at the end of May; memories of G.M. at the Regrattier are mainly summer ones. He talked much, one of these times, of the journey of Héloïse and Abélard down the reaches of the Seine, but I remember nothing being said about Milton and nothing planned for that reading of *Paradise Lost* together, advocated in this letter of a little while before.

121 Ebury Street, November 6, 1923

Dearest Nancy,

You follow the same instincts that I followed and I think with the same avidity; therefore our characters and temperaments must be sufficiently alike for you to understand me better than another. I know the mood out of which you write and can tell you the way to rid yourself of the intellectual aridity you complain of. I know it well. We have often listened for a knock, hoping it would bring a visitor into the room; any letter is to us (at certain times) better than no letter. We have walked across the room and stretching our arms in weariness have cried — I must go out and talk to somebody. The impulse and the moment is common to both of us and it must be suppressed else the restlessness and the intellectual aridity will be with us on the morrow. Nancy, if you would hear the Muse you must prepare silent hours for her and not be disappointed if she breaks the appointment you have made with her. The Muse is resentful, she punishes but she is forgiving, and if you will persevere she will visit you suddenly, mayhap in the morning whilst bathing. To receive the Muse as it is her due to be received, you must have an apartment. You must dine in and alone very often. You see that I am prescribing. When you were ill you had force of character to diet yourself — you did as you were bidden and if you desire the Muse you can get her by following my prescription.

Now about my visit to Paris. If I could jump into an aeroplane and fly to you I think I should find the mood out of which you wrote already gone. But that is not much to the point, for if I do go to Paris it will be to help you look for an 'appartement' and for you to see me as often and as long as it pleases you.

You know I have set my heart on your reading *Paradise Lost* not for pleasure but for profit and you have not read a line of Milton; yet you expect to write blank verse. Ah, if you had an apartment how easy everything would be. I could come to you for dinner and discussion and the reading of *Paradise Lost*. What is your hotel like? I don't see why I shouldn't come over next week for my book is finished and

I think you feel I could be of use to you, or is this a mis-reading of your letter?

Where had he got such an idea, I asked, telling him I had read what everyone reads of Milton; no one gets through classes or school without *Lycidas*, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, all of which I found beautiful. I had read the whole of *Paradise Lost* at Holt when I was sixteen, appreciating the skill much more than the whole long subject, not being moved by the great work at all — and I put my early nineteenth-century edition of it into his hands when he first came to me on the Île St Louis. Even then whatever was said did not lead to a reading of it together; I am certain I should remember that. Nor did he call my attention to what he has written himself: 'Though I recognised Milton to be a great poet, he wrote in vain so far as I was concerned.' Un-Miltonised I seem to have remained, for in the next letter, well, free verse it is:

121 *Ebury Street*, November 13, 1923

Your letter gave an unexpected turn to my thoughts. I see now that to be intimate with you I must study free verse, else resign my post as critic of your verse and exponent of your talent, and so I propose to read some of Eliot's verse with you when you come to London in ten days or a fortnight. You shall be my guide. I wish I had had your letter a month ago for I should have been able to include some remarks on free verse in my dialogue with Freeman and de la Mare.

Your proposal that I should return to Paris with you is excellent, for go to Paris I must to look after the translation that is being done of *The Brook Kerith*. Thereby hangs a tale too long to tell in this letter. In encouragement I will say that if you know what you want you will get it. Half the battle is consciousness of the bourne you are aiming for.

Your mother told me you had found an apartment on the island. The Halévys have a lovely house on the island and I

will take you to see them. I have just only [*sic*] finished the preface to *Conversations in Ebury Street*. The book will be published in January and I think you will like this book as much as any book you have read of mine, and I am engaged on a very romantic story — an Irish Don Juan, Ireland in the 13th century, and the anecdote is one of my best.

Cross together to Paris we did, and had the sea not been so rough, and certain words floated anew from his lips, ("Tell me about your lovers' is an acceptable subject, in certain moods, for a long journey) I would have told him, maybe, about one of the things at that moment in my pocket.

'Nor "gift" nor "lover", I would have begun.' That I should be in possession of the man's Army Colt revolver makes neither any the more true. But Robert Nichols is far away; I do not even know where he is, and here am I, perforce with his gun — unloaded, of course.' And then I would tell G.M. of the grand, histrionic gesture with which it was flung at my feet, the French maid rushing out of the room in alarm, and of how the poet screeched that it would be better in my hands than in his, for he did not know what he might not do. A large dinner-party had immediately followed; we had all gone to the Albert Hall fancy-dress ball, the poet the only one in ordinary clothes, 'a demon in mufti amid the flamboyant train' might have been a graceful thing to say to him. I would not call Nichols an exhibitionist although, in those days, he came precious near it; I would recount the awful need he had of dramatising himself. Indeed, I would say, there are his *Sonnets to Aurelia*, dedicated to me, of which he sent me the entire manuscript, loose sheets, first drafts, errata, final versions, all bound together in sumptuous

crimson with a golden N set above a wreath of bay-leaves round his name. These sonnets tell of every kind of lurid occasion that never arose at all between us — poetic licence if ever there was.

G.M. would approve, more or less, of some of the sonnets, for they are academic in form and contain some beautiful lines, and of course he must have read them. Well, I would resume, one does not throw away a revolver. It has remained with me, hidden, for several years and is now merely part of the removal of all my last things to France. Without a licence it is, of course, contraband — as is that parting present of half a bottle of old whisky in the other pocket of this stiff-as-a-board leopard-skin coat — two ugly bulges the douanier may well enquire into. . . . As I thought of all this it grew hotter yet in the airless corner we had found aboard. G.M. sat motionless beside me at a table, folded up into himself, spiritually and physically impervious to the sea banging against the ship, asleep or half-asleep, not in the least ill but seeming to me rather old, and entirely my responsibility at that moment. Very likely he would not have cared at all for the story of the revolver and the chance of an immediate corollary at the Calais customs. It was rather silently and without incident that we reached Paris.

He did take me to see Daniel Halévy and his mother — a pleasant moment, among courteous, rather old-world people. He approved of the apartment I had found but had not yet been able to move into. And it was Christmas Eve or Christmas night that I set him at the top of a long, narrow table of twelve at the dinner I gave for him in the room upstairs at the Rotonde. A dinner of twelve — how

easy a thing to encompass in Montparnasse in those days. I hoped he would not mind, nor did he mind in the least, that everyone else except Brancusi was rather young.

But who were the diners? I cannot recall them exactly. G.M. sat flanked by two gorgeous young women. I think Maric Beerbohm, that wand of grace and punning wit, a niece of Max Beerbohm's, must have been there, and Dolly Wilde, handsome beauty and brilliant talker, niece of Oscar Wilde. Tzara and his fellow countryman whom I had met with him, the Rumanian sculptor Brancusi (a fine bearded-old-shepherd of a face and to my mind one of the great sculptors of all time) were certainly there, as were three young Americans, Eugene MacCown, the painter, Walter Shaw, then studying photography with Man Ray, and Jo Milward who wrote articles on art for American magazines. Iris Tree, the poet and daughter of Sir Herbert Tree, and Jan Sliwinski, the Polish singer and founder of *Le Sacre du Printemps* music-shop? Pierre de Massot, the French writer and his lovely Scottish wife, Robie? They were surely asked. Mary Reynolds, a beautiful American, friend of Marcel Duchamp and of so many artists? Nina Hamnett who lived then in Montparnasse? Maybe some of them came in after dinner.

Unforgotten is the vision of G.M. between those two young women, the singer and *diseuse* Yvonne Georges, with her Eton crop and immense, expressive eyes, and Clotilde Vail, whose long golden hair could be flung to the ground with a single shake to free it from the one pin or comb that held it up. Both had dressed themselves to perfection for him. They knew his eye for feminine flesh; well did they know the period that pleased him, and both of them were artists in taste. One looked like a Manet in

black and white with something vaguely pink that nestled or floated; the other, in blue and green with a touch of yellow was a Renoir come to life. Thus, respectively, were Yvonne and Clotilde. No fancy dress had been invoked. The clever arranging of hair and corsage and of certain accessories — a fur tippet on one, a tiny rakish straw hat on the other, besides some tulle, feathers and a bow or two, made unmistakable the allusion to the Impressionists.

'Tangle-toe', it seems, was going on at dinner under part of the table, and this having been told me many years later I can only hope retrospectively that it may, at some moment, have reached him. How gallantly would he have reacted. An approach from either (from both, judging by the way he was getting on with them above the table) would have been reciprocated. The gentle pressure of a small foot in black velvet on his own, the soupçon of a golden slipper feeling its way.... From which would it have come more acceptably? Who can tell, for both of them played up to him with great brilliance, as the wine flowed without stint.

Had he noticed, I asked him later, the allusion to the Impressionists? Indeed he had. Very attractive young women, a great many people would certainly think that, and of course they knew it themselves, each an artist in her own way. They stood up very well in these elaborate gowns, said he, to the coquettes with their bustles and *falbalas* of his youth in the *Confessions* and *Memoirs*. But why had he not seen that high kick of Clotilde that brought down the cascade of golden, gothic hair? To have heard Yvonne singing her tragic '*Pars sans te retourner*' would have been good too — in her black

velvet dress naked to the hips at the back in a beautiful V, for her stage-presence must be a fine one.

Many of my friends in Paris met G.M. with me at different times, although he generally preferred to have dinner with me alone at the Reagrattier. It may have been there that a much-smiling, confidential conversation took place which prompted him to write such words in the volume of *Ave* he inscribed to:

‘Solita Solano — whose beautiful teeth I shall never forget.’

Or it may have been in a café, the Deux Magots or the Café de Flore, that Solita’s Latin charm started him thinking about her. He would be sure to do that, she being not only attractive in one of the ways he liked, but an encouraging terrain for his enquiries into human relationships. As she recalls:

‘It was with *un gros oeil polisson* that he said “You must tell me everything about that early, unhappy marriage!” ’

I think I see them in memory at a table, bending forward to each other, successfully isolated in a hubbub. In a café it must have been. Here, at last, was one person, in the crowd of hurrying people all doing three or four things at a time, who had the clean gift of consecutiveness. *That* will have pleased him.

‘Pretty’ comments always came to G.M. in his little dedications to women, often to women he had never seen and would never see, such as the words he sent a young admirer in America, in reply to a photograph of herself in a bathing-suit: ‘I could wish the water away.’

There are some words written into one book of his that transcend the word 'pretty' by far:

'To Nancy, with much affection, from her first friend,
George Moore, April 5th, 1922.'

So this was not my thought alone! It must have lain deep in memory when I began these pages. I have not opened that particular copy of *Memoirs of my Dead Life* for a long time, not until now, my first friend. . . .

NINETEEN

Du Côté de Chez Swann and *A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleur*, said G.M. to me about this time, were certainly remarkable titles and he had been 'looking into Proust' — trying to read him would be more exact. But oh my Lord, the style of the man!

He began talking to me about it in the slowest lift ever set in motion, that in the Hotel Sélect, Place de la Sorbonne, where I then lived. We were going to the top, a mere fourth or fifth floor, but when the contraption finally trickled to its bourn, a minute or two had to pass before we got out — G.M., now wound up about Proust, must first bring his little reel to an end. And as bells began to ring and voices remonstrated '*Al-lons, allons, ascenseur!*' the end was reached with the words:

'He writes like a man trying to plough a field with a pair of knitting needles!'

And yet — the conversation was carried on later — as all things are transient, one wave of time soon rolling over the preceding one, even Proust in all his present fame would have to find his proper place in the literature of the past. No! He did not like him. To call Proust a 'bad' author would obviously be ridiculous; you could not dismiss him. But *he* found no pleasure in reading twenty, thirty pages about something that might have been fully

expressed in one, in two. And then, it was all very well to say 'about something', but he was not always sure what he was reading about.

As for Joyce's work, that too would take its place in literature. What were students of letters going to say in the year 2000, of the writing of today, this kind of writing? It was a lengthy talk, into which came Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and Wyndham Lewis, and it ended on the word 'Chaos!', 'Not chaos to me', I ventured to murmur, whereat we talked of other things.

(What G.M. said to me then in general about the opinions that would be formed in the year 2000 came back when, in 1945, I had the brisk pleasure of meeting Julien Benda, who opened fire on the same subject, except that it was the work of André Breton and the Surrealists, the painting of Picasso and Cubism that drew his expostulations. The cannonade lasted twenty minutes and was a joy to hear, if not to agree with. And then, as with G.M., other things were talked of.)

'Other things', after Proust and speculations over the perplexity of the year 2000, included a suggestion from G.M. that we should go to some antique-shops together. He was, he confided, on a quest and it was a long one already; it might, alas, lead to nothing. He wanted to fulfil a long-felt desire; that meant giving himself a present, and that present was *an old-fashioned, painted bidet*, such as were made in France in about 1850 — a bidet in a wooden case with a lid to it, a bidet in metal or in porcelain, the inside prettily painted with flowers or other designs. At the bottom there *must* be painted a human eye gazing upwards — unless I thought we could come across one containing the Eye of God instead. Well, said he,

chuckling at my surprise, never mind what eye it is, so long as such a bidet can be found.

His own surprise was great when he heard I had never seen such a thing and was unaware of its existence; they were quite frequent at one time, he said. 'And all bought up by collectors now', we were forced to conclude after days of searching, not only then but during the subsequent times that he came to Paris.

I feel sure there was a request to find him that bidet in one of the letters that have disappeared. It would look very well, he always said, among the Early Victorian pieces of furniture in Ebury Street — oh, in his bedroom of course.

Months would sometimes go by without my seeing G.M., for I continued to live in Paris. Yet the fact that, at one time, I had nearer eighty than sixty letters from him suggests that we wrote to each other fairly often and regularly. He was a charming correspondent. How did he put it? 'The good letter-writer must be full of himself'; there was something about 'necessary egotism' in the phrase.

How productive he was that year. In 1924 his anthology, *Pure Poetry* came out, and later *The Pastoral Loves of Daphnis and Chloe*. *Ulick and Soracha* was well-advanced if not almost finished; the names bring back what he said of this book:

'It is not for the Irish Don Juan to tell the tale. No; the story must be seen through the eyes of Tadhg, the knight's retainer.'

It was a masterly find for his treatment of that story in Ireland in the fourteenth century — Tadhg's wanderings

through the invasions of Robert the Bruce, his long exile in Scotland, his return to Ireland to find his master again after twenty years, Sir Ulick now a hermit by a lake.

121 *Ebury Street, March 16th, 1924*

It is beginning to seem a long while and perhaps you are beginning to feel that it would be pleasant to write and to receive a letter. The work I have been doing has kept you in my thoughts, for when you were a little girl I used to talk to you about an anthology of pure poetry but you were too young to understand objective poetry, and now the anthology is completed. Would that we had searched out the lovely flowers together but we cannot go searching for poetry whilst a sea is between us. I propose to cross the sea in May and to spend a month near Fontainebleau. Shall I see you or are you going to spend the month of June in London?

The romantic story has been drafted in several dictations and only requires going over with the pen, and the title of the story for the moment is *The Rape of Soracha* (rape used in the original sense of enlèvement.) But I am not satisfied. *Ulick and Soracha* is more reticent and I like reticence.

The admiration which he voiced several times to me for the *Moralités Légendaires* of Jules Laforgue also returns when I open my copy of *Daphnis and Chloe*:

'Dearest Nancy, Here is a book that you will enjoy reading. Do come back. I am still thinking of the two pleasant hours we spent together, for I love you very dearly. George Moore, Xmas, '24.'

In the Introduction is stated his perplexity, for inspiration has left him; what shall he turn to next? He thinks of Laforgue, a translation of the *Moralités Légendaires*, a beautiful work. As he told me in Ebury Street one day, they were exact contemporaries in Paris; so were this book and G.M.'s *Confessions d'un Jeune Anglais* (as it was

called in French), both coming out in the same numbers of Dujardin's *Revue Indépendante*. The Introduction says that his mood was wrong at that time; he would make a new English version of *Daphnis and Chloe* instead.

Critics of his work will have found it easier than I to characterise his taste in Letters; it seemed to me broad and often unpredictable, and then, to be sure, it underwent several changes and he might swing back to a work he had gone away from. There were fixed admirations; Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* was an eminent one, and *Tristram Shandy*, which he took with him to read on his way to the Holy Land.

Words in a letter to a friend are slightly mysterious:

'Our likes in art do not depend on our will.'

May one take it that he also means writing — that he means: we cannot explain our likes *entirely*?

The words come to my mind at this point on account of his surprising letter about a long poem of mine in free verse published by the Hogarth Press in 1925. I should not have thought he would have felt any sympathy with *Parallax*, and yet:

121 Ebury Street, April 19, 1925

I was without suspicion of the pleasant hour about to strike when I cut the string of the parcel that brought your poem. The tattered web of your poem interprets (perhaps I should have said represents) the tattered web of life, and I feel in reading it that you are developing your own self so strangely personal. The bourne towards which you are moving is obscure to me but your poem inspires confidence that there is something behind the words and that that something will become clearer when I read you again, which will be tonight, and I feel too that a little time, perhaps a good deal of time, is needed for readers to apprehend

all the meanings your tale enfold. But it will be understood and the elusiveness that puzzles today will be tomorrow's delight. I shall have more to say about your poem in May if you are in Paris in May. . . . In mingled affection and admiration.

Another kind of astonishment was caused me by G.M. later that year, in a letter that illustrates the impulsive side of his nature, and sudden inspirations. To this day I cannot decide if I should say 'Alas, the plan was never put into practice' or feel relieved that circumstances made such an exchange out of the question. To think of myself living for six months every year in Ebury Street still fills me with awe. The thought of his living, meanwhile, in the not very comfortable Rue le Regrattier remains as disquieting. The idea, shorn of material elements, such as some sudden annoyance on his part leading to an unexpected return to London, and complete dislocation of life on mine, is delightful:

121 Ebury Street, August 20th, 1925

When I was your age a French writer said to me: you are missing your chances of becoming an English writer by living in France. On looking back I cannot avoid the conclusion that I should not have done as well as I have done if I had not returned to England. We must live a good deal in the country we address. Now what do you think of this, will you live in my house in Ebury Street for six months of the year and let me live for six months in your flat? A very simple arrangement. You will pay my servants and I will pay yours. The arrangement from a literary point of view will be highly beneficial.

For some reason that I cannot remember, the idea soon seemed equally impossible to him. It was in London I saw a good deal of G.M. that winter, and, in a cottage at Sax's

Platt in Sussex, plunged in a total reading of Joyce's *Ulysses*, agreed all the more with his simile that 'living speech' is the essential 'wheel'. What can have prompted the sudden message?

121 Ebury Street, January 8th, 1926

I have a copy of *The Lake* for you and would like to send it you if you will send me your address; and I would like you to remember that as literature rises out of speech it must always retain the accent of speech; even in the description of landscape or of the human mind speech should never be quite lost sight of — living speech is to literature what the wheel is to the wheelbarrow.

Dearest Nancy, come to see me next week.

T W E N T Y

It must have been about now that I took Janet Flanner to make G.M.'s acquaintance in Ebury Street.

That bright recorder of doings in France and writer of 'profiles' for the *New Yorker*, a good friend of mine and for many years a great admirer of G.M.'s works, felt curious about meeting him. Was he going to be at all 'difficult'? she asked. And I, accustomed to G.M.'s ways and moods, his rhythm of speech and the manner in which his mind worked, now and then giving a great leap, said Oh, not in the least. And so we arrived, a few minutes after five. It seems we had been expected at five, and five was not, he soon bade me notice, ten past. Janet recalls it very well:

"The old gentleman petrified me. He was upstairs in his drawing-room, at tea. As we came in he said "You are late" and took a bite out of his bread and butter. You said politely, "We were looking at the beautiful pictures on the stairs", and the conversation began about painting and then turned to modern painting, which he told us he did not like. Very winningly you said to him: "But when you were a young man in Paris, you used to like 'the new things', when they were new. And now you don't like any, or almost any, of the new paintings. Why is this I wonder?" The old gentleman was not to be drawn. He took another gulp of tea and another bite of bread and butter, and I sat there petrified.'

This recalls something. It was one of those days when

G.M. wore an absolutely 'white' look concerning all subjects and persons and he was being rather formal. But he did not remain so to the end. He went into modern painting a little for our benefit, repeating what he had already told me: 'I cannot get even as far as Cézanne!' To Janet Flanner he now said: 'Well, it is no use my trying to understand certain kinds of painting. I have seen a portrait of Cézanne — a portrait of a peasant *by* a peasant. And I have also read some of Mr Joyce's *Ulysses*. It cannot be a novel, for there isn't a tree in it!'

That hour so nicely remembered by Janet contained the remark that Monet did some painting at first in the manner of Manet, while Manet turned later to painting in the style of Monet. As for Berthe Morisot, she would not have become the fine painter she was — perhaps the best of all women painters — without the influence of Manet. Look how wonderfully she always handled the white in her pictures; no one ever made such a fine use of white. We turned to his beautiful Morisots but, being summer poems in green and blue, both of them suffused with yellow sunlight, they offered no example of this. Monet's 'Willows in a Flood' — not only, it seemed, could one guess the season but the hour of day in what he had called 'a mauve morning', surely one in the valley of the Seine? It pleased him greatly that his pictures should be appreciated, discussed and asked questions about. There was a lot of '*chien*', said he, to most of the drawings Degas made of ballet-girls — a dressmaker's or a stage word, indicating an arrogant, provocative dash; did we see what he meant in his Degas pastel? I think Janet was overcome by the beauty of the Manet portrait.

As we walked away I told her it had been a typical hour,

and that what he said of *Ulysses* had once been said to me on the score of Fielding's *Tom Jones*, where there was 'no feeling of nature, not a single tree!' She thought he had a very curious way of speaking: 'that special accentuation of words like "a" and "the", as if they counted a great deal.' He had talked a little, suddenly, of his relations with a woman who, long ago, used greatly to attract and greatly annoy him; goodness, said Janet, how frank he was in word and deed when he gave that woman to understand she should no longer have the chance of keeping him dangling, frustrated! And she went on marvelling at G.M., although now she calls it 'being scandalised': 'So *this* is the character of *The Lovers of Orelay*'!

We went over his feeling for painting. How constant a thing with him, second only to his preoccupation with writing. Nor is it strange. How much there is in him of the painter's vision; he *was* a painter for ten years or so and naturally the sense of it persists, despite the rueful decision he took that what he was doing with brush and canvas 'would not do', the critic in him overcoming the artist, just about the time he met the Impressionists in Paris in the mid-seventies. He must have a fine eye for composition.

The very word! It evokes a little thing that stood, about this time, on the piano in my Paris apartment — a cardboard advertisement for Dubonnet, taken from a café simply because the composition of this commercial piece was so very pleasing.

Three of us sat looking at it on the occasion when G.M. and Louis Aragon first met there in 1926, while, behind

the tea-tray, I waited for the explosions that might burst from the conversation on either side, after the preliminary fencing that was going on.

On the whole, I think Aragon and I got off very lightly. G.M. had been in the past few days to several exhibitions of ultra-modern art — probably not for more than a few moments, still, he had 'looked in'. It was the heyday of *avant-garde* movements: Dada, although done with by its creator, Tristan Tzara, had spawned some descendants who, lacking the pyrotechnical brilliance of his intellect, yet banged the same drum. Surrealism was triumphant at that very moment. Its wordy battles and battling poets were constantly to the fore and Aragon was one of its two founder-leaders. In films and photography there was a new vision and a new technique. In writing, new modes that dealt largely, perhaps mainly, with the 'abstract' and were bent on lassoing dreams and coralling the subconscious into strangely evolved sentences. As for painting! Painting was as it had never been before in the whole history of art.

Well, G.M. must have had his fill of seeing and hearing about it all, and felt in the mood to tell us a good deal of what he thought. He was on one of those visits to Paris where, for a start, the noise and the traffic drove him mad. His business was partly with Dujardin; the old friends he saw, Mme Duclaux, the Halévys, Miss Sands and Miss Hudson, and Jacques Emile Blanche (Blanche had recently exclaimed '*Ces Surréalistes sont en train de perdre la France!*') were a long way from the elliptical writing in broken-up syntax and the general dynamics in music, poetry and art. Tzara, Picabia, Cocteau, Man Ray, Antheil, Brancusi; Picasso, Miro, Braque, Juan Gris, Dali; Breton,

Aragon, Eluard, Max Ernst and how many more, made it truly the most brilliant epoch, so far, in this century. Fantastic is contrast! To think that elsewhere at the same time, were G.M., Edmund Gosse, Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett. . . .

In my apartment there were then two Chiricos, two Tanguys and a large Picabia gouache of a man with four pairs of eyes, a body spotted all over with vermilion dots and one arm sheathed in black. (I think G.M. did not notice it.) There were other contemporary paintings and drawings, including several MacCowns, but not in the direct line of vision. There was also a comfortable settee in plum-coloured velvet and on this G.M. sat for an hour or so, asking Aragon a few relatively mild questions about the modern way of feeling in art and in writing.

No, I thought, there will be no explosions. Anything might touch off G.M., a hasty word about 'form' would do, but Aragon's beautiful breeding is here to confront all dangers. His appreciation of every word that comes from G.M. is visible; he is paying the greatest attention, enjoying every minute of him. Aragon will be proof against any of his baits and traps about the arts.

'Precisely', said G.M. 'You wanted that advertisement of the bottle, the carafe and the tumbler on the tray because it is a good composition. I see that. I accept that, for it is very pleasing. But will you tell me how you can find merit in this simple thing and yet say that you admire Chirico?', and he gazed at 'La Nostalgie du Poète', a beautiful work done in 1923, in his best manner. 'What is it about? And here is this blue thing by Tanguy. What is *that* about? I notice some peaks, or maybe I should say some cliff-tops, curling in a way that was never yet seen

by man — one cannot call it a landscape. I do wish you would tell me what you see in these painters and in all the rest of them! And that, propped against the table: “Oiseaux percés de flèches” by André Masson. Where are the birds? I do not perceive a single feather.’

His remarks burgoned presently into remonstrances about ‘lack of form’, ‘iconoclasm gone crazy’, ‘insane technique’ — although there was no technique to anything any longer, said he; that had gone by the board among the first lot of rules to be jettisoned. Wondering if it were worth while, I remember suggesting that what these painters ‘and all the rest of them’ were after was the discovery of new modes and forms; and found them they had, in their new subjects. Did he not like the colouring, say, in *any* of the painting of cubic and geometrical arrangements, or the composition in any of the abstract designs? Such painting was far from being a new thing in 1926, but continued developing and was as ever-changing as art itself, etc. G.M. said that the Pons Asinorum of Euclid done in scarlet and blue paper lozenges, would never be a pleasure to him. The bars and cafés of Paris, some of them, were now beginning to be made hideous with this sort of thing. The Impressionists, said I, raised a frightful storm in their time (did they seem as revolutionary then as Braque and Picasso now?) As for Manet . . . ‘Oh yes’, agreed G.M. ‘but Manet was a genius and you are not going to tell me that all of these. . . .’

Several times his eye lit up with malice as it turned towards Aragon, but whatever he was preparing came to nought, Aragon continuing to smile gently, talking with due deference and complete objectivity. As soon as he left, G.M. assured me he was much impressed. That

young man looked like someone to be counted with and would probably go far. Dear me, what a good talker! He said what he meant to the end, even though he, G.M., could not go into all the reasons for modern art, or, for that matter, follow any of them. To be articulate, said he, is not given to every young man; moreover, he was very good-looking.

To Aragon, G.M. with his astonishingly individual use of French (we had heard him express himself with all sorts of *finesses*) seemed as fabulous as I had expected; there was no other word for him but 'unique'.

T W E N T Y - O N E

121 Ebury Street, 1st April, 1926

Dearest Nancy,

When you came here you were very winning, tender and inclined to confidences, moods that are dear to me, who know that love is not stinted to three primary forms, like the colours, red, blue and yellow. Not many people know love in any other aspect. A few understand love in secondary aspects, to continue the colour comparison, purple, green and orange. Some know love in still finer stages, delicate shades of mauve, mauve fading into grey, mauve rising out of grey into rose, mauve declining from rose into blue. I dare not hope to catch you in the same mood of wistfulness (which is a pity for it becomes you well) when we meet in Paris; but I hope for the best, and to obtain the best I am sending you a story called 'Priscilla and Emily Lofft'. It will help you to write your own story, which, as I told you, must begin with a retrospect. You will find the 'hads' difficult; there mustn't be too many and there mustn't be too few. When you are in doubt refer to the enclosure; it will serve you as a pattern. We may discover the end of the story together in Paris, for the end of the story depends on the power of the teller. An end that would provide an excellent theme for one writer would be valueless for another. To make myself plain, I will quote the old adage: everyone must cut his cloth according to his own measure.

CONFIDENCES! I remember about whom and why, the very date is a peg for memory amid all his draping of love-colours more subtle than purple and red. The story he mentions was written and torn up later. Soon came a long conversation about love, I trying to keep him to monologue; for G.M. arrived in Paris and. . .

We had been lunching that day somewhere in Montparnasse and were ambling slowly back towards the Seine down the Rue Notre Dame des Champs. Was it here — talking, how beautifully, of the emotional pangs that love brought into some lives, the great joy it procured in those of others, everyone going out to seek and no one finding what he or she sought, but finding something — was it here or in some nearby street that he came to a stop, breaking off in the middle of a sentence to gaze up silently at a third floor in one of those white and grey houses? Turning to me he said: 'Yes, it was there . . . and, my Lord, it was long ago.' She had been a wonderful woman and he very much in love with her; no doubt she would be dead by now. And then — confidences, confidences! Never had he talked to me quite like this before.

'I was a great dab at making love, you know!', said he, turning again to me brusquely with his eyes rolling. And then both of us gazed up together for a long time in silence. The window remained closed, the house blank. Better so; no face appearing there but would have seemed out of place, except her own, her own of long ago. G.M. appeared stricken with a sudden melancholy and the sadness was communicated to me, so dreadful is the passing of time that relatively soon transmutes 'have' into 'had'. But really, 'a great dab'! Were anyone else to use that expression in such a context one would burst out laughing; yet there was nothing funny about it at all, and after a little pause we resumed our walk.

Still ambling down the hill G.M. now began to tell me about his 'prowesses', and the evident savouring of them seemed to drive the sadness away. Oh, she had been adorable! It was here, perhaps, that he learned more than

anywhere else what physical love is capable of. His erotic prowesses that had gone on who knows how many years ago behind that window were indeed impressive and when they came to an abrupt end it was almost on a note of warning: 'No one can keep up *that* sort of thing for very long at a time — hardly more than two or three weeks — no health will stand it!'

I believe every word he said about those exploits and am perfectly content to think of him as 'a great dab' at such things — to speak about it here at all is doubtless encouraging to those who hold that he was always boasting about his conquests. It seems to me that I knew G.M. fairly well, and although he had considerable reserve he had also moments of sudden expansiveness, and as soon as he looked like talking about himself he received the greatest encouragement from me. Well, he was not often in such a mood as today's, and though he had been interestingly explicit he was no more boastful about it than that she was 'a conquest'. The prowesses had been stated as facts, and those facts had come to pass, no doubt because they were madly in love with each other. His women were *never* named, never named to me or in my presence; I can think of only two in all for certain and both affairs were public knowledge.

The legend-spiders have said that far from being in the 'kiss but never tell' tradition, he was the very opposite, 'one who doesn't ever kiss but tells', and somehow this has become bound up with the belief that he was impotent during the whole of his life. Ever since the first time (such occasions were not frequent) that 'adventures' with himself as hero were talked of to me, all of it seemed like a sort of 'self-editing' and so objective that he appeared to

be talking less about himself than of some character created by him — exteriorising, externalising, 'ex-personalising', even dramatising the little picture, with his merry innuendos.

Everyone who knew G.M. will remember how eccentric he was; Aragon called him 'unique', but that was in a different context. However, 'unique' may not be too bad a word for G.M. on the score of love. His attitude was this: he was deeply respectful of the great love-tragedies, of love sincere and enduring. But on a lesser plane, far from Isolde, in the sphere of 'gallantries', 'step-asides' and 'passages' he was a mixture of roguishness, naiveté, wit, and drollery. At times salacious, he saw no harm in coming out with a gross word or two, when applicable: 'Why object to old English — surely "belly", a word in Shakespeare and the Bible, cannot be asked to make way for "tummy"?'

How the 'impotence' legend began, I cannot imagine. 'Boastful of conquests that never occurred' has been grafted on to it; this seems such an artless pseudo-Freudian deduction that it sounds like something invented when psycho-analysis was the rage. But some lines will be found in *Salve* — some pages in fact — where it is very clearly stated indeed that he thought his virility was forsaking him and coming to an end a little after the age of fifty. Thus something wrongly remembered and further garbled may well be the origin of the nonsense.

Many years later it did amuse him at times to say that some of the women who, attracted by his celebrity, came to see him on various pretexts, did so in the 'Shall I, shall I?' spirit. Or come to him thus perhaps they really did, because he was a great and famous writer and it would

be a fine feather in the cap to say, 'Well, in London there was George Moore, and would you believe it. . . .' One might hear from him about such a moment if there were a funny twist to it — no names were appended.

Many men were jealous of him, a thing I have seen myself at Holt first of all. His eccentric personality bothered them and they could not write it off because, although he did a lot of 'mumming', he was never anyone's fool. His agreeable ascendancy over the women who were delighted by his attentions was another thorn to such gentlemen.

A man, especially a conventional man, might take quicker exception than a woman to 'boasting about conquests'. How many a blue-blood of England has revelled in such boasts: a twirl of the moustache and out come time, place, name of the girl and all. Nothing could be more different than G.M.'s unspecific, amusing confidences from the deportment of such clubmen and guardsmen. Whatever he told, he told with style, because it seemed to him worthy of notice. During all the years I knew him, his attitude towards erotic adventures was one as a rule of wonderment: the writer appeared to be struck by the circumstances (he couldn't have invented *that!*), the setting was original, the dilemma piquant. Again I say that he seemed to me like a character of his own finding, one that he was following up, commenting on.

Yes, a woman would be more prone to listen to G.M. with a great deal of curiosity and a great deal of sympathy than, in general, a man. Not so many are the natural links of amity and sympathy between men and women — shall I say — we are so often at war. Leave us, oh men, our

indulgence towards such a *rarissima avis* as G.M. when his confidences are spoken into our ears!

I am penetrated through and through by an intelligent, passionate, dreamy interest in sex, going much deeper than the mere rutting instinct, and turn to women as a plant does to the light, as unconsciously, breathing them through every pore, and my writings are but the exhalation that follows the inspiration.

These are words of his in *Ave*.

Personally I think he would have been shocked to learn that he was considered boastful and brimming with conquests, one who kissed not but told; he may or he may not have been aware of this part of his legend. One cannot put the truth better than John Freeman, who gives him 'aristocracy of mind'. It was in no way incompatible with *The Lovers of Orelay*, with *Euphion in Texas* or any other of his stories about women that may be taken as autobiographical or as romancing in part or in whole.

Preserved, for some, in a cocoon of legend is he, distortion (once again) pleasing more than truth — although Joseph Hone's *Life* should have once and for all established the true character of George Moore, so exact is it all. No words of mine can hope to succeed in removing distortion, and yet I will not be silent:

'In music Moore was interested only by Wagner' — another complete error.

'George Moore — practically illiterate.'

Oh Dr Gogarty! We all know what you mean, your outrage is quite a gem and doubtless you and G.M. had a romp or two together about it all while he was still alive. How ready he was to agree that his reading was astonishingly full of gaps, of the very gaps that would never be

found in the literary education of a professional writer. But I foresee that your 'illiterate' (shorn of 'practically', a faintly attenuating influence) will be incorporated within the next gospel about Moore. The propagator will back it up with lines (by Moore, of course) that will exquisitely fit. They are in the Preface to his *Confessions of a Young Man*:

'At the time of writing them, I knew nothing of Jean Jacques Rousseau. It is barely credible that I could have lived into early manhood without having heard of him.'

'Perfect!' the propagator will exclaim; 'just what I want for our ignoramus', and will snap the book shut, or else be so entranced with his find that other lines soon after these are imperceptible:

'The study of Shelley's poetry had led me to read very nearly all the English lyric poets; Shelley's atheism had led me to read Kant, Spinoza, Godwin, Darwin and Mill.'

'Not bad for an illiterate, at the start', someone else may say. For me (again quoting G.M.) 'Dickens I knew by heart' must suffice, along with a recommendation of the rest of that page. We shall not labour the point — although I imagine that as long as George Moore is read anywhere in the world the cry may go up in various languages, 'Long live such an illiterate!'

T W E N T Y - T W O

IN the summer of 1928 I started printing and publishing small signed editions of living authors. My Hours Press was the hundred-year-old press that had belonged to William Bird in Paris, the Three Mountains. It was now installed in a small outhouse at my home in Normandy where, since all the work was to be done by hand, I should first have to learn to set type.

The beautiful if unwieldy old press had hardly been fitted together and the type unpacked before G.M. announced that he was going to give me something of his 'so as to start off your venture with a good bang'. It was his own idea, as kindly as auspicious, and it slightly flustered me, for the editions of his books were more and more *de luxe*, and the honour of publishing him lay a little disconcertingly on the novice. The presence, however, of a dour printer, ensured that, technically, nothing could go wrong. Very soon arrived the American edition of *Peronnik the Fool*, a well-produced little volume of sixty-nine pages, with a good many alterations in his own hand. Not without trepidation were they looked at in this edition of William Rudge's, 785 copies designed by Bruce Rogers in 1927 in New York. A 'revised edition of *Peronnik the Fool*' would be the first book produced by the Hours Press.

At no time has G.M.'s handwriting been a difficulty to me and all his indications were clear, while the first

hour at type-setting by hand showed me how quickly, and agreeably, this could be learned. 'Rather like sewing, in that the letters come together stitch by stitch. One's wrist is soon aching, and by the time five lines interlaced with two-point spacing are in the composing-stick, it feels as if it would never straighten again, but what of that?' I was soon saying to G.M. in my mind. Alas that he could not see me learning a craft — the very word had always been a delight to him. Alas that he could never come to Réanville, being too ill at that time to leave his treatment in London.

Two weeks in a heat-wave alone with the ill-tempered printer, followed by a five-day solitude during which I set *and also printed* the second lot of four pages, alone and unaided — such was the beginning. I look upon it as one of the (uncommunicably) great exploits of my life — but only printers will understand that, especially those who work on very old hand-presses.

The heat caused the Velin de Rives paper to dry before it should, and it was almost crisp again by the time it came together with the inked composition. To obtain, and keep, the right amount of pressure on the old Mathieu was the worst of all. The ink glistened up at me encouragingly from some of the lines, yet inches of them here and there were heavily indented on the page; the print on others looked too thin. At least there was no 'printer's thumb', no 'printer's foot', on the virgin whiteness now turning into pp. 7 and 8, for unlike him I managed somehow to keep clean. Yet with anxiety I looked at my work. We had dispensed with galley-proofs, of course — there is nothing like the novice for forging ahead in his glorious ignorance of how things are done. But galley-proofs were

unnecessary in this case, and G.M. never fussed me in his letters, leaving everything to my taste, although we had a little correspondence later about 'the gutter'.

He was very particular about printing and rightly so. What a thing was this to start off with, a signed edition of 200 copies at £2 apiece; the long day at last over, I seemed to hear G.M.'s voice in my sleep: 'My Lord! *This* is not printing! Whole paragraphs in Braille! What do your fingers tell you, Nancy?'

Whether or no he noticed the irregularities in the pressure (not all the pages, by any means, were questionable) he never wrote a word about it and maybe I was over-sensitive. It was 'the gutter' that would not do. Too much space between the print on opposite pages is an ugly thing, he said, and when the matter had been explained to the sneering printer and the change insisted on, the new pages looked all the better and now pleased G.M.:

121 Ebury Street, 12th July, 1928

I like very much the proof of *Peronnik* that arrived today. I hope you understand that I do not consider this imposition the only imposition, but it is the basis from which most impositions spring, and when I saw so much gutter in the first specimen that you sent me I felt it to be my duty to beg of you to take note that in all the 17th and 18th century books a beautiful spacing was always the printer's first consideration. I hope you will buy some old books; your collection, as it develops, will interest you more and more. You do not say that you like the new imposition. I hope you do, for what I am after is to please you first of all. I will show Heinemann the page you sent me, and he may give you an order for the printing of a considerable number of copies. But of this I know nothing; the only thing to do is to wait.

I will write you in a day or two about coming over to see you. I have just come upon a packet of the love letters you used to write me when you were a child of ten or a

dozen years. These are as delightful as the first flush of morning.

'Small book — long work' was ever in my mind, although the setting of the Caslon-Old-Face eleven-point letters went quicker and quicker, and it was with surprise, having thought everything settled about the edition, that I read his telegram, and with relief, his letter:

121 Ebury Street, 11th September, 1928

I sent you a telegram saying 'Peronnik free', and looked forward to telling you in a letter that if he weren't free I would arrange that Evans¹ should give his consent to your publishing an edition.

If you wish to make certain of selling the whole edition quickly you have only to write a preface, and the subject of that preface should be Holt. I wish you would turn those past times over in your mind; spend an evening or two with the subject, and perchance it may flash into your mind in literary form. The story is a very living one and will delight everybody as much as it delights you when I remind you of. . . I stop without having said all, leaving the selection of the subject-matter to you.

Of course, a preface of the kind I suggest would cause that cheerless soul, T.S. Eliot, to frown, but personal literature, as I have often impressed upon you, is the only literature for the age it is written and for the age that follows. It isn't easy, however, and it has to be cultivated. A new edition has just been published of *Memoirs of my Dead Life* and it will explain what I mean, far better than a few lines in a letter can do. Read 'The Lovers of Orelay' in the French text. Of all my writings it is the most popular and will continue to be the most popular. I repeat, read it in the French text. A good translation helps a story like time and varnish and glass help a picture.

You want to hear about my health. Well, it is just the same as it was. It seems a pity that I should not have been all this while living in your lovely house, which I long to see

¹ The head of Heinemann.

almost as much as I long to see you. I shall not be happy till I am there, walking round the little domain with you and hearing all about the printing. But when will this be, Nancy? You cannot help me and I cannot help myself, and a visitor has just come in and I have to leave off talking to you.

To write a preface was out of the question — everything was out of the question except printing, and now one last fear assailed me, for, opening *Ave*, I soon came upon the words:

‘On the proofs of the original edition one correction alone amounted to the striking out of some twenty or thirty pages and the writing in of as many new pages . . . for proofs always inspire me.’

Inspired or no, *that* should not happen here! Moreover, he would spoil his pretty tale if he altered anything in it at all — the story that Héloïse wrote for her little son, Astrolabe, to help him get back his French after the long time the boy had been in Brittany speaking nothing but Breton. It was too long, he thought, to put into *Héloïse* and *Abélard*; the digression would distract the reader’s attention and interrupt the flow of the book.

There were no further corrections, inspiration having had its say between 1927 and 1928, and I suppose the differences between Rudge’s edition and mine are sufficient to please the collectors. *Peronnik*, the first book of my Hours Press, took the printer and myself about three months to do; there had been the interruption of summer holidays, the last of its sixty-three pages were printed in the bleak, windswept days of December. I could have wished the pale blue cloth covers and gold lettering very much better turned out by the Paris binders. The format is pleasant, the paper beautiful; the title-page, after two or

three attempts, looks handsome and was commended by G.M. The edition sold out practically on publication about Christmas-time in 1928, and there were some nice reviews. We were going fifty-fifty on it, once the costs of production had been deducted. Obviously other letters from G.M. about *Peronnik* were among those that have disappeared, for this one of so long after can only refer to my last payment to him of all:

121 Ebury Street, 2nd May, 1930

Thank you for the cheque. I gather from it that you have made as much money as I have out of *Peronnik*, an illustrated edition of which will be published in the autumn.

The Arts Theatre is searching London for an ideal cast for *The Passing of the Essenes*, a play which the three or four people who have read it look upon as my masterpiece, a word much discredited these days, for according to the newspapers all the bureaux of literature publish at least thirty if not more 'masterpieces' a year. It is not probable that I shall see the play acted, for I am going into the Home if Sir John should deem me suitable for operation, next week. Your mother will tell you which home.

I have to break off now, though I am loth to do so. It is good news indeed to hear that I shall see you in London in three weeks.



Nancy Cunard, 1930, by Cecil Beaton

T W E N T Y - T H R E E

SOMEONE may wonder what it was like dining with G.M. *tête-à-tête* in Ebury Street, and all I can say is what it was like for me.

One arrived punctually at eight. G.M. was waiting downstairs in *the* room and there was a venerable courtesy about him. Or he might be on the doorstep scanning the street.

The table was already laid and dinner soon brought in, a nice parlourmaid rustling about quietly with the dishes. There would be a rather flat soup, or sometimes a delicious *bisque d'écrevisse*; on the whole, the soup was a little *à l'anglaise*.

Fish or joint, sometimes both. As I like almost no fish I remember it as a great gob or slice of heavy white on my plate, or it might be entire on a fine dish, for the colours of Royal Worcester seem to arise. Alternatively, an *omelette baveuse* would arrive, the cooking of it admirably timed.

The roast was always a fine one, or it would be a nice chop done to a turn, or an entire chicken. That would slightly bother G.M. — carving — with those hands that seemed inapt at buttons and corkscrews, yet he carved well enough and was punctilious about the bread-sauce or breadcrumbs; this suggests pheasant; fine pheasant and grouse sent him by shooting friends have I eaten there. The vegetables were done in the British way. A sweet next, some moulded contrivance which I swallowed

quickly, or a delicious, milky baby-pudding. Or cheese instead; at times the good old 'mouse-trap' kind, at times running Brie in season — cheese, biscuits and a pear. (What, he asked me once, was the origin of '*entre la poire et le fromage*', a peculiar expression used by journalists to describe the moment chosen for a confidential matter between two politicians at a banquet. That was the meaning, was it not? Exactly the meaning, the origin of which I could not tell him.) The coffee was small and strong, with an apostle spoon.

There would be a bottle of Burgundy, Médoc, Graves or Rhine wine, poured out a touch sparingly for my taste, accustomed to the different rhythm of *vin ordinaire* in France. The wine was all right in the house of a light-drinking man, and I am surprised at the remark in Hone's *Life* that G.M.'s knowledge of wines was so imperfect that he would send his parlourmaid round with a jug of hot water to be poured, if desired, into the claret. Yet it rings a small echo; this did happen once with me, G.M. saying that particular claret was so nasty that some hot water might well alleviate its sourness.

Was he ever drunk, even once in his life — surely everyone is drunk once, if never again? I doubt it. Bibulous he never was, and not even in his days in Paris can he have crashed a glass down in emphasis or indulged in no heel-taps, although he must have been surrounded by those who did. The mysterious chemistry in the bodies of all of us said 'no' in his case to the enticements of excess. He hated a drunken man, simply hated the sight of one, the accompanying boredom, the ungainliness, the degradation. As for a drunken woman, that was beyond everything. And yet, poor Kate!

Naturalism or realism, whichever was the right word in the eighties for the style of that novel, how (I would wonder to myself) could it be that he did so well with the evolution of drunkenness in his *Mummer's Wife*, he who could never have got into her skin; masterly is the long decline of Kate, poor Kate in the vicious circle of sherry and jealousy, jealousy and brandy, and above all, loneliness. Did he ever live on the edge of such a case? I doubt it. Thus is he an even finer artist, the suffering all vicariously done. One of the most moving stories ever written; one feels drawn to Kate . . . such thoughts would pass in my mind during a pause in the talk or even while he was speaking and I half-hearing him. Ah, that pair of pale eyes on the right of me, facing my own pale eyes when we turned to each other — a 'consanguinity' between us because of the Celts and Ireland. At times the mystery of him, the sudden tenderness I felt over his age and whiteness, the great admiration in me for his beautiful 'composing' would . . . well, that is a sentence that I cannot finish.

And not by a very long chalk was this G.M. of mine at such moments the same figure he appeared to many — to the stage-managers and actors he fussed with at rehearsals, the young men fobbed off because what they had sent him for an opinion was really 'too impossible', and so on.

The table would be cleared, we moved to the fire a step away, sitting contentedly each side of it, and in an hour or so it would be nearly eleven, a taxi would be 'summoned' or I would walk away.

He had talked, meanwhile, sometimes about his books. *Kerith* had made him forget once to go to a dance at my mother's, not so much *Kerith* as Paul. So engrossed was he in preparing a difficult article on Paul that was to be read at

Christmas, showing how the authorship of the Acts must be attributed to him, that time had slipped away and it was only next day he realised he had gone to bed instead, thinking of the great trove there was in the subject. It had given him *The Apostle* and *The Passing of the Essenes*, two plays with an end different to that of *The Brook Kerith*. At the time that had come out, in 1916, the reviewers had seemed not to know that Jesus did not lay claim to divinity, the way the story is told in the three synoptic gospels.

Once, talking to me of his plays, *The Apostle* and *The Coming of Gabrielle*, he wondered if he had succeeded as well with the technique of drama as with that of his novels; writing for the stage is different from the composition of prose. One thing was certain: Athene Seyler! What a magnificent actress; she had such *justesse* and such *finesse* (words impossible, said he, to put exactly into English) that, well, he was 'raving about her', as the saying goes.

He made a remark about music which I cannot think out, calling it 'the remotest of all the arts', quickly adding that this remoteness is by no means an enemy of emotion, for emotion should be the heart of music and, to go further, of all the arts.

Well, there was nothing new for him to say about free verse; yet, although he still could not see the reason for its existence, it was clear to him by now that a number of poets — mistakenly or no — were expressing themselves seriously in that medium, and with sincerity. He supposed he must make the concession that the *absence* of regular rhythm could be called 'a medium'? He now saw that free verse was not a passing mode or phase.

Was G.M. becoming more tolerant? At times I thought so, at such times he appeared very mellow indeed. In any case, one would not write off anyone as fundamentally intolerant who had long said that *advice is not of very much use, everything has to be thought out for oneself*.

His mind was often on France, on the creative greatness of the last century there, which had begun with Ingres and ended with Toulouse-Lautrec who, to his way of thinking, had nothing like the genius of the Impressionists yet did have flashes of passion, *le coup de pinceau*, which — as with Constantin Guys — suggested everything he wanted to say, and a sarcasm all his own. Ah, he would lament to me, that he might but see the Ingres in the artist's native town, Montauban, but he feared it was now too late. In literature, well, to have produced Flaubert was already enormous; he put Maupassant far below the master. Now he might turn to that frequent thought of his: 'A man has a score or twenty-five books in him, if his life be long enough. We need not begin thinking of Balzac, for of course Balzac was prolific beyond belief.'

'Zola', I murmured once, and, to my indignation, full measure of abuse began to descend. What, not even some of the strange situations so adroitly handled in *Nana* (above all such a good *story*), the priest's uncertainty about his faith in *Lourdes*, the mustering of foods of all kinds in *Le Ventre de Paris* — did none of this count? Nothing in *La Terre*, nothing in *Germinal*? 'Well,' said G.M. coldly, 'if you like *journalism*' — the way he might have said 'if you like *journalèse*'. The characterisation, meticulous descriptions, dramatic sense, inventiveness in Zola — nothing of all this? No! said he.

Having changed his mind at different times about a good many authors, he has given his reasons for so doing and maybe Zola is the most outstanding case. He set so much store by beautiful writing and fine prose, one is tempted to say that everything else went by the board; as with poetry, form seemed to dominate over content and character. Yet he altered some of the things he had written about Zola, thinking he had been unfair and had decried him too much.

Sometimes he would talk of what comes into many of his books, of 'the mystery there is about all human beings'. Solitary lives interested him and the stories about 'aloneness' fill an entire volume. *In Strict Singleness* might, at one time have been the title. Should it be *In Single Strictness* or *In Strict Singleness*? He went into this at length with me, saying both of them sounded like 'mixed biscuits', and how many 's'-es there are in the English language. Titles are the very devil, said he, although a good one sometimes descends upon the author if he be lucky, and sometimes there is a wonderful title going begging, with no story to be attached. Well, it would have to be *In Single Strictness*; on the whole, that was the less vexing of the two.

Digressions from one theme to another would cease, the subject not yet finished with be retraced. People had led to singleness and . . . what had we been talking about? Ah yes, some of the beautiful women of today.

Diana Cooper, I said, and 'Astarte' he replied on the spot, adding: 'I fancy she has been called *that* before'. Mary Curzon was 'a poem in blue and gold', evoking the idea of Helen of Troy. The mummer's daughter, Iris

Tree — very striking, with that heavy fringe, to whom Epstein had done justice in his bust of her (although of course Epstein was part of modern art). Elegance is not what it was, 'but then, you know, I stick to my time, and would like to see the bustle come back'. Still, he did think Marjorie Craigie very elegant; what a constant preoccupation to some women are their clothes; it is their way of expressing themselves. Well, there were numbers of beautiful women about, 'but', and he drifted away from them, 'I am not of their time.'

It may have been some of the paintings or drawings of Toulouse-Lautrec, and I think the words he used were 'those purposeful women', that got us on to the subject of Lesbians.

'Oh well, Lesbians . . .' and he began to chuckle. 'One says "dearest" and the other replies "darling", and then they gaze into each other's eyes, and then they tick-el each other a little. But what can they *do*? Khk, Khk, Khk.'

I told him he was talking as if *tout ça n'était qu'une bonne blague* and nothing more. Oh, he assured me, nothing of the kind; it could be a very serious thing, for them. But what, he wanted to know, could they *do*?

How well I remember that moment in Ebury Street because now I asked him immediately what he thought about pederasts.

He was on to his feet out of the chair in a second — always a sign that something disturbed him greatly:

'Ah, that is a very different matter', he exploded, becoming more and more indignant and walking about the room; 'those are horrid practices.' [Curiously enough, these are the exact words in an 1830 dictionary: 'Certain

horrid practices in use amongst the Bulgarians in the Middle Ages'.]

'It was the ruin of Wilde, horrible to think of. Wilde's case was so horrible that people couldn't bear to talk about it, although of course they talked all the same — indeed, all the more. It is against nature.'

As we had got so far I thought I would ask him how it could be against nature, since man is part of nature, and certain men, etc. No matter how one might feel, why not be detached, surely one could not but accept the fact?

He found it impossible to think of anyone condoning pederasty and not being as shocked as he. The Greeks, of course . . . No, no, the thing was degrading. Although throughout the ages many brilliant artists had. . . No, no; he would not accept pederasty as 'a normal thing for certain men'. He looked at me searchingly as we both expanded on the theme.

'In nature, you say, because certain youths and men have such proclivities? A fact, such as one kind of tree not being another kind of tree — that is what you have just said, is it not? Oh well, if you look at it that way. . . '

He was greatly disturbed, and in a moment he had found his climax: 'Think of two men calling each other 'darling', as I am told some of them do! Oh no, my dear Nancy, it does not bear thinking about!'

It was dreadful to hear him complain, occasionally, that he had had 'a lack-lustre day', and startling to hear him say he was sure such days never came to me — dreadful to listen to the kind of thoughts written so many years before in *Bring in the Lamp*. How much those pages in *Memoirs of my Dead Life* are connected for me with Ebury Street at

this time: 'Tea is over, the dusk gathers and the brute Despondency lurks in the corners.' He would talk to me in the vein from which those pages had flowed three decades before in the *Memoirs*: 'Whosoever he may be, proof is not wanting that the world can do well without his work.' This, ah this, is what an artist takes on, and the sooner he comes to terms with it, the better for him. For of course, he would say, an artist, a writer has to go on: What should I do, Nancy, if I had not to write! I cannot stop! Sameness and change, both of them without purpose, yet we go on — go on we must. Oh, pull the blind, do, and light the lamp — turn on the light, I mean — he would groan.

There was suddenly a presence in the room, it had entered while the curtains were being drawn:

'Oh! Here is Sarky. Look what a beautiful cat he is!'

A neighbour's cat frequently visited G.M. His mood of gloom was temporarily distracted by the gorgeous tom, that double armful who demanded fondling, leapt on to his lap, turned himself over and over there, making eyes at him, rolling in and out of his arms ecstatically and calling on all his attention. Very handsome they looked together — the fluff and featheriness of Sarky, who was very large, and G.M., about whom there seemed a sort of frothy white contour, the oval now entirely perfected.

His charm, his charm, I would be thinking. To those of us who have ever felt it, surely it never becomes less.

There was also a kind of serenity about him at times, now that he was nearly eighty, in this quiet backwater where he would think of himself as 'the hermit of Ebury Street'. How many different things were discussed by us: art, love, sex, people, the progress of my Press, the way I

'resembled' him through having chosen to live in France; yes, resembled, he maintained, although I had already gone further than he in point of time: ten years by now for me, under ten for him in Paris in the seventies. And one day up came an entirely new subject, for I had begun to study 'the question of colour', that is to say, the darker races, the Negro people in particular. Wondering if he had any feeling one way or another, sympathy or hostility, I asked him, after some general remarks, if he thought he had any colour prejudice.

No, said he; no, he thought he had none. He knew what I was talking about, although the subject had never come his way. No, no prejudice. The fact was that he had never known anyone of colour, not even an Indian — philosopher, poet or student — as might easily have come about.

'I have met neither a brown man, nor yet a black man — although my books are translated into Chinese!' said he, beaming. Pondering for a moment he then confided:

'I do not think I should get on with a brown man, nor with a black man. I think the best I could manage would be a yel-low man!'

And the sound of his voice in happy crescendo was suddenly like an organ when the player has pulled out all the stops.

T W E N T Y - F O U R

It is here, with the brusque unexpectedness of life itself that I have to write 'I never saw him again'. Living in France entirely at that time without a visit to England for more than two years, being in Toulon when he died on January 21, 1933, the gravity of his condition was even unknown to me.

He had been in relatively good health that afternoon in early December 1930, at one moment even exuberant. Indeed, we had talked of a private matter and very funny he was about it, when a sudden question of mine got him on to his feet out of that chair, not because it disturbed but because it startled and, from what he said, delighted him. Buried here it shall lie beneath what he once wrote a friend on the subject of gossip:

'It loses its character when it is written down; ink is an adjuvant which develops a dangerous quality in harmless ingredients.'

That day he also told me a dream, telling it so charmingly that I mentioned it again before leaving him. Well, he had set the words down, here they were — and when he had read them aloud I, seeing the little thing immediately in print, asked him to let me have it for the Hours Press. Protesting much that it was very slight, he agreed to its being published.

But he fell ill again in the spring of 1931 and was clearly far too ill to attend to anything, so the question remained

unanswered for weeks: would he not sign the two-page plaque of which five hundred hand-set copies were printed and waiting in Paris? Who knows by what erroneous self-suggestion he got the notion that some preposterous sum, such as three guineas, was going to be charged for each copy. No letters of mine assuring him this was ridiculous made any difference; in the end it was obviously necessary to give up the idea. So the dream he had read me that last time in Ebury Street remained all printed and ready and never saw its public, at ten shillings a copy — the right charge, surely, the signature alone, as they say commercially, being worth that.

THE TALKING PINE

A few nights ago I dreamt a poem in my armchair after dinner. In it a man walked in a pine-forest admiring the trees that were about him but not one fulfilled his ambition, which was to find the tallest pine-tree in the world. In his wanderings he heard a voice, and as nobody was about he concluded that it came from the branches, but they were empty. At last the voice spoke to him out of the earth, saying:

‘I was once the tree that thou art in search of.’

‘And where art thou now?’ the man asked.

‘My roots are here’, the voice answered, ‘but myself is the mast of a great ship.’

Whereupon I awoke in a great fright, overturning the electric lamp at my elbow, but holding fast to the last line of my poem:

‘Some dream of pine-trees, and some of ships.’

I suppose it was at the end of that year (he would be eighty on February 24th, 1932), that the letter of homage to him came for signing: ‘A message of congratulations’, said his friends, Mr Wilson Steer, Professor Tonks and Mr Charles Morgan; the signatures would be bound into

a book and given to him — a finely written page of appreciation of the artist.

who has not ceased to labour with a single mind in the perfection of his craft, who has written in *Daphnis and Chloe* a flawless translation, in *Esther Waters* a tale that marks a period in our literature, in *Hail and Farewell* an autobiography that has rank with Rousseau's, in *Héloïse and Abélard* a philosophical romance of supreme beauty, and in *The Brook Kerith* a prose epic unique in the English language. The uses of that language have been changed by your influence. . . . You have taught narrative to flow again and anecdote to illumine it as the sun a stream . . . and on your eightieth birthday your pen is still unfailing in your hand.

In his hand it was to the very end, for the long and lovely tale of Greece in the time of Phidias, *Aphrodite in Aulis*, is not quite his last work. It was about half way through *A Communication to my Friends* that his hand could no longer seek his pen, a very few days before he died.

He had said once to the steward of Moore Hall (as Hone tells in his *Life*): 'Get my ashes when I die'; they should be scattered over Lough Carra.

Long years before, at the time of his mother's death at Moore Hall, as he wandered sadly through the spring beeches and larches waiting for her burial, he had thought of the problem his own burial was going to cause. It should be pagan! There is something in one that asks for lastingness: he saw the burning of his body on a vast pyre, the great mound of stones that would presently rise atop of the urn containing his ashes. Yet there may be laws in Ireland against such rites. Lastingness! cried his soul, while his spirit quailed at the idea of being entombed in the

family vault. Beautiful and happy in its serene prose is the progress of these thoughts in *Resurgam* at the end of the *Memoirs of my Dead Life*, and it leads to the immutable, longest lastingness of all: the sea. The urn shall descend into the sea and there it will stay, safe from change, suspended perhaps, very, very deep, until world's end. For the world will of course end some day, a cataclysm will see to that. Yet it will as surely be born anew. Everything will come to pass once more exactly as before, in countless billions of years, until the right time has come for him, George Moore, to be once again occupied with the same train of thought, writing these very lines, as now, in the same room.

And if *that* isn't the fittest of all services and endings for such a soul in space!

What was decided is told in *Hone's Life*, and although George Moore had left no specific instructions in his will, his hope seems to have been well understood, his wish remembered: it was a burial amid nature. His ashes were brought from London to Ireland, the urn that his brother, the Colonel, had had copied from one of the Irish Bronze Age, was rowed out to Castle Island on Lough Carra and put into the prepared hollow in stony ground, a cairn raised atop. From here, a mile away, you see Moore Hall and the Partry Hills (it was they that came to him sometimes at Holt, evoked there by its own blue distances); the great woods round the shell of the house are in sight.

Much has he written about Lough Carra and the hills and woodlands round Moore Hall. To think of him now amid the stones, the waters and the trees is just and right — the 'mystery' of man's life over, that of the trees continuous, for to him they seemed second in mystery only to

that in the life of man. And although these words sound like words spoken in a dream, 'trees that are the nobility of nature', they are his, and they were said to me I know not when throughout all the years.

EPILOGUE

IN September 1946 I found myself in Andorra, oldest of all republics and small autonomous enclave in the midst of the Pyrenees between France and Spain. It is a semi-legendary place that came into being in the time of Charlemagne and has remained for centuries the home of contraband, carried on a man's back along the dangerous paths of midnight. Today, grown rich and possessed of a sudden, flourishing modernity, a few stretches and hamlets remain yet unpolluted, a tower on a rock, a lonely chapel of mediaeval times, its remoteness as complete as ever from the outer world.

It was to Notre Dame de Meritxell that I walked one morning, turning a little off the high road to find the humble, pretty chapel half hooked, half tucked into the mountain's flank. A miraculous virgin, a miraculous peach or pear tree that had once burst into bloom amid the snows — these are the lore of Meritxell, and it was perhaps three and not one ancient sculpture of the Virgin that made the church famous, but that was fast shut. The priest, however, soon appeared, a youngish, swarthy, active man whisking about in his skirts, and we plunged into conversation. The statues of the virgin were ancient indeed, and almost black; the rough old wood carved with a hatchet suggested a peasant's hand; they might belong, I thought, to the eleventh or twelfth century. Not so many tourists came here, I supposed. No, said the priest with

some bitterness, tourists were more interested in driving their noisy cars through the Republic from end to end without stopping for more than a drink or a meal, ostentatious vulgarians most of them, judging by their behaviour; raising the dust, they used the road as a hill-climbing test, now and again knocking down a woman or a child. He sighed, saying his life here was a lonely one, as he drew out of drawers and shelves the entire collection of magnificent old brocaded church vestments, insisting on my appraisal of each in turn. It was good to talk to someone, he told me, who appreciated the fine things of old.

The priest was a Catalan, the spiritual matters of Andorra being under the jurisdiction of Spain, of the Bishop of Urgel, down there across the frontier. Like most things here that 'come up from Spain' (wine and food, linen, tobacco, and the contraband that passes on into France) he too had 'come up from Spain', and was soon launched into a flaming account of the Church's ordeal there during the Spanish war. Presently he asked me my nationality, for my Spanish was very fluent indeed, he said, and it would not take much to make it free of errors entirely. From thoughts about England he moved on to religion. So I was a Protestant . . . at that he shook his head. It was something to do, I suppose, with his evident zeal and intelligence that called for frankness in me, and I told him I was not religious and did not consider myself a believer.

At this he looked at me thoughtfully, saying:

'I find that much easier to understand than anyone being a Protestant. But, without a faith, do you not feel alone in life?'

'I do not feel alone, or lonely.'

‘But it is terrible to be alone in life, without a faith. I do not understand. . . .’

We had moved from the church, where all the rich vestments were now put away again lovingly until the next traveller should fall upon him as unexpectedly as I; the legends had been told and I was thinking of thanking him and being on my way, when he suggested that we sit for a moment on the grass in the lambent sunshine. Now he began to proselytise me, running straight to the point: why not become a convert, why not embrace Catholicism? And such was his eloquence it might well have moved another. Now this, I thought, is taking us too far. It will be rude to leave him between one word and the next, and there is no offence — but offence there soon will be unless he stops his proselytising. And casting about for a subject that would deflect the torrent of words, there came suddenly into my mind the thought of *The Brook Kerith*.

‘There are paradoxical people everywhere’, I began, ‘and I should like to hear how you can explain this curious fact: a great and famous Irish writer called George Moore, whom I knew, although non-religious and very strongly anti-Catholic, was so possessed by the story of Jesus and the effects of Christianity, that he wrote a number of books in which the Christian religion and its influence on the consciences of men and women are the dominant note. One of his acknowledged masterpieces is the story of Jesus and Paul. *The Brook Kerith* (*El Rio Kerith*, or, more exactly, *El Riachuelo Kerith*) is a great book and a very long one — the word “novel” seems trivial in this context; from the same theme later, Moore drew two plays. The theme is this: Paul, driven by the great force within him, is set on propagating the new

religion, Christianity, although it is shown him that one simple yet overpowering fact must perforce invalidate the truth of its foundation.'

After a few more words, seeing that I held the priest's attention with 'the mystery of Jesus's death on the cross or no', I told him all I could remember of *Kerith*:

'This is the gist of it all: Jesus's death was not death but a long swoon on the cross, from which he returned to life. The story is seen first through the eyes of Joseph of Arimathea, who is greatly drawn to Jesus and his teachings after the baptism by John in the wilderness. Jesus and the apostles are shown as very simple men, the Nazarene is a mixture of inspired grace and sombre anger, his conviction growing upon him, in both these moods, that he is the Son of God. When Jesus is crucified, Joseph, an influential man, contrives to prevent the spear from being driven in by the soldier, the poor martyr seeming dead already, and he obtains of Pilate the right to bury Jesus in his own tomb. It is there, alone with Joseph who is bidding him a sorrowing farewell, that Jesus comes out of the swoon that resembled death. He is now hidden and healed by Joseph and physical health returns, yet his mind appears to be in a daze, as if all were forgotten. After some months he leaves Joseph and goes to the Essene monks (who live far away in the hills in great solitude near the brook called Kerith), having been a shepherd to them while yet an adolescent, before he left them to follow John and perform his miracles. The monks receive him gladly and without questions, their remoteness making it possible for them not to have heard of the crucifixion, of which there were many in those times; in any case, not to connect Jesus with that.

"Twenty years pass thus, Jesus tending the flocks on the hills, and one night a stranger comes to the door of the cenoby — Paul, fleeing from the wrath of the priests and Jews who would kill him on account of his new religion, for he has made many converts to Christianity — a word that means nothing to the Essenes. That night it comes about that Jesus, now fifty-three years of age, must tell his story to the monks, in front of Paul, of the 'two lost years' that led to the crucifixion. When he reaches the point where he held himself to be divine and the Son of God, Paul, unwilling to believe this shepherd-Jesus of today can ever have been Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, died on the cross and was resurrected, is sorely troubled. And when Jesus has said a little more, Paul, to whom Jesus-the-Son-of-God spoke out of a cloud bidding him carry the Christian faith to all, rushes out shouting 'A madman!' and disappears into the night.

'It had been promised that Jesus, who knew all the mountain paths, should set Paul on his road the next day to Caesarea, and this, on his finding Paul again in the wilderness, Jesus now does. They walk together, at first avoiding all mention of the extraordinary and troubling meeting; so Jesus himself at this moment is helping Paul, by setting him on his way, to spread a great untruth; while Paul, who rushed out in frenzy and thus could not hear how Jesus came back to life, continues to wonder if the shepherd be not demented. Little by little they talk, the dilemma now spreading like a sea around Paul: if Jesus is really alive and actually speaking to him, what shall become of Christianity without the miracle of the resurrection? All the work done so far, in vain; work that will have to cease if. . . . Jesus questions his conscience

again: should he not go to Jerusalem to show himself, a living man? The priests will welcome this, for it will mean the downfall of Paul, their enemy. Or will they turn him away, scornfully saying the poor shepherd from the hills is out of his mind? In the end, neither prevails over the other, and when Jesus leaves Paul, this meeting with him is almost as if it had never been, for Paul's decision to continue spreading the faith is unaltered. Jesus has told him that the voice that spoke from a cloud was that of a Jesus of Paul's own imagination, the true Son of God — and after a long and at times bitter haze of argument they part, Jesus to wander and perhaps to join some monks that have come from India rather than return to the Essenes, Paul faring forward on a great wave of vigour towards Rome and later Spain, making new converts to Christianity everywhere for many years.'

The priest listened in silence and concentration, his mind far now from the proselytising of a stray Protestant unbeliever. 'It is a wonderful theme', he murmured; 'I have never heard of this before'. I talked on a little, saying that such a rough telling, perforce bereft of the many implications and changing stresses within the book, lacking the characterisation, the atmosphere and the beautiful prose of Moore, was a great injustice to the author, who had told the whole story with such a freshness that even the known parts of it might never have been told before.

It had left the priest very pensive, and 'Ah, that George Moore were here!' I cried aloud, saying how glad a witness I would be to the discussion arising between them. 'It is a problem to move us all, believer and unbeliever alike', I said. 'For what, in such a pass, would one do if one

were Paul? His anguish of mind can be sensed — is the great faith that has become the whole of his life and being to be annulled, cancelled, wiped out? Were the author of *Kerith* but here, I believe that after nearly twenty centuries the whole question would be as if born again between you, to be faced, to be decided anew.'

'I must get that book somehow', the priest said; 'the whole story fills me with amazement. That such a man should have elected to write on such a theme!'

We continued talking a few moments more of the book and the author and then arose from the grass, and again I thought to leave him, but he said that he must refresh me first. Climbing a little higher to an old stone house, the rambling solitude in which he lived, the priest brought from it wine and cake and some little pears that were just ripe. Our talk turned to Andorra; he wanted, he said, to offer me this house, he would like me to come and stay here, but it would arouse comment, for he lived alone. Yet, when he was away, for he sometimes went elsewhere in his parish for a few days, it should be mine, he would lend it to me. It was now long past noon and the sun lay warm on our shoulders, along the idyllic pastures below and the sombre, dramatic mountain-side. Marvelling somewhat at him, I bade him goodbye — the fragrance of his pears and wine is revived at this moment within me, and the strange nature of our meeting.

'Adios!' the voice floated after me, and as I turned to wave, 'I shall pray to the Virgin for you all the same. Come back, come back some day!'

And now, imperceptibly, it seemed as if G.M. had come to walk beside me and all about us was a sort of

wonderment. We were going down the rocky slope together on a path that wound this way and that near the miraculous peach or pear tree which had blossomed in the snow. We went in silence and yet were communicating our thoughts to each other, as will happen sometimes in a dream where no voices speak yet things continue to be said. We agreed first of all that to have got the priest off his proselytising with the sudden thought of *The Brook Kerith* was remarkable, by telling him the whole story as far and as well as memory would afford. The strange thing was that, never a moment restive, he had listened to every word of it until the end. I had laid too much stress on the conflict in Paul's mind, said G.M.; there is less conflict in him than anger at Jesus; above all, there is the disbelief (and Paul naturally clings to it) that this shepherd-Jesus can be Paul's Jesus who spoke to him out of the cloud; there is Paul's great fear that Jesus will go to Jerusalem to denounce him: 'How can Paul's teaching be right if I, Jesus, am alive?' I had given Paul a different conscience and credit for more anguish of mind than appears in the story. That is what memory will do, imparting a different tinge, after a number of years, to some element in the original. The essential point, however, is unattackable by time and no one could miss the essential which is Paul's set mind, for nothing can deflect him from preaching Christianity.

The whole theme will have been a great morsel for the Spanish priest to swallow. Now, would he ponder it, would he prefer to digest or to eschew it? Not to eschew it, I said; his attitude showed us that.

A man of character, the priest — intense and vibrating, a black sort of flame in his eye, with a kind of peculiar

fervour that seemed to come straight out of Spanish history. A generous nature; yet his eloquence suggested it would not, on occasion, be above the use of threats, and one would prefer to see that dark Spanish fire at play with someone of equal intellect rather than at work in the pulpit on an ignorant, cowed peasantry. It is the fervour of an imaginative, possibly a creative man, I said. The story had interested him intensely and his imagination forbade the interruptions that might have broken from another in protest against the great heresy — for all this would be heresy, would it not, to a Catholic priest? Yet look at what he had said, pensively and with such visible feeling: 'A wonderful theme. I am overcome by it, for I have never before heard the story of Christ envisaged in such a manner.' He had been neither angry nor shocked. And when he came out of his absorption at the moment there was no more for me to tell, he had asked again about the author and I had further told him:

'Although he detested the whole of Catholic dogma, he was on good terms with many a Catholic; one of his best friends was of that faith, and the Irish priests were in and out of his life the whole time during the Irish part of it. Nowhere in his writings is there an attack on Christ or the Bible. And no Christian, Protestant or Catholic, can be angered at the spirit and manner in which *Kerith* is written; the whole story is told with respect in a grave and beautiful voice. You see, this George Moore—of great renown wherever the English tongue is read — was a very great artist.'

'A great writer he must have been', the priest had said, 'else he could not have taken the story of Jesus to develop it with such an extraordinary originality. I find it very

wonderful that such a man should embrace such a theme.'

'He will be thinking of it at this moment', we said to each other. 'He will think of it for days, for weeks in his solitude at Meritxell; he will bear it within him when he goes to Spain . . .' and G.M. went on musing beside me.

'What do you fancy it was that interested him most of all?' he said in a moment. 'The fact that Jesus never claimed divinity, as is indicated in three out of the four Gospels? If there be a sense of humility in him, the priest will have been moved by Jesus repenting of his pride and the over-reaching of his power that led him to believe he was truly the Son of God. Maybe the priest is thinking, and rightly, that the whole of Christianity was hanging at one moment on a thread, and if Paul's character had been different, there would have come a sudden end to his journeyings and as sudden a recantation of the new faith, Paul being now perceived to be but one more of the many prophets and mystics. Or indeed, he may be thinking of none of these things, but that he has a fair chance of catching an English woman as a convert to Rome — tenacity of purpose can be very blinding at times.'

The thought-words between us led me more and more to the same question: what, in the whole revelation, had interested the priest most of all?

'Paul's energy and determination would appeal to such a man', G.M. continued, 'and his success. We must not forget how enticing is success. Will you not tell me where you think his interest lies the most — is it in this new version of Jesus's character, is it in Paul's conviction, despite all, that he must pursue his way?'

And now, having reached the end of my thought, it seemed as if I turned to G.M. and said:

‘In none of these things, because his interest — indeed, his wonderment — I think it lies in you.’

